THE DAYS OF MY LIFE.

AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY.

BY

THE AUTHOR OF

"MARGARET MAITLAND," "LILLIESLEAF,"

&c., &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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BOOK II.

THE

DAYS OF MY LIFE.

THE FIRST DAY.

It is rather difficult for a girl, after all her solemn and awful anticipations of the wonderful event of her marriage, to find after it is over that she is precisely the same person as she was before—that instead of the sudden elevation, the gravity, and decorum, and stateliness of character which would become this maturer stage of her existence, she has brought all her girlish faults with her, all her youth and extravagance, and is in reality, just as she was a few months ago, neither wiser, nor older, nor having greater command of herself, than when

she was a young unwedded girl. After I became accustomed to Harry's constant companionship, and got over the first awe of myself and my changed position, I was extremely puzzled to find myself quite unchanged. No, I had not bidden a solemn adieu to my youth when I left my father's house; I was as young as ever, as impulsive, as eager, as ready to enjoy or to be miserable. I could fancy, indeed, with all this novelty, and the gay foreign life around us, and Harry's anxiety to please, and amuse, and keep me happy—I who knew life only as it passed in our lonely drawing-room and garden, or in the dull streets of Cambridge—that youth instead of being ended, was only beginning for me.

I was in vigorous health, and had an adventurous spirit. Long rapid journeys had in them a strange exhilaration for me. I liked the idea of our rapid race over states and empires; the motion, and speed, and constant change made the great charm of our travel. I did not care for museums and picture-galleries; but I

cared for a bright passing glimpse of an old picturesque town, a grand castle or cathedral; and though the road we travelled was a road which people call hackneyed, and worn out, the resort of cockney tourists, and all manner of book-makers—yet it was perfectly fresh to me.

This day was in the early part of October, chill, bracing, and sunshiny. A very wearisome journey on the day before, had brought us to an old German town, where there were neither tourists nor English; but old embattled walls, Gothic houses and churches dating far back into those picturesque rude centuries, when they knew the art of building, whatever other arts they did not know. Young and light of heart, as we were, our fatigue vanished with the night, and when we had taken our coffee and our hard leathery rolls, in the light, cold, carpetless *salle* of our inn, we went out arm in arm for one of our long rambles, with no cicerone to disturb our enjoyment. We were not model sightseers—we did not find out what was to be admired

beforehand, nor seek the lions—we were only two very young people much delighted with these novel scenes, and with each other, who were in no mood to be critical. We delighted to lose ourselves in these quaint old streets—to trace their curious intricacies, to find out the noble vistas here and there, where the high houses stretched along in peaked and varied lines to the golden haze, in which there was some smoke and a great deal of sunshine, and behind which lay the sky. We saw the churches, and admired and wondered at them, but our great fascination was in the streets where everything savoured of another land and time; the peasant dress, the characteristic features, the strange tongue, which, except when Harry spoke it, was unintelligable to me, made all these streets animated pictures to my eager observation.

I was a very good walker, and not easily wearied, and Harry was only too eager to do every thing I pleased. We came and went, enjoying every thing—and I think our fresh

young English faces, our freedom, and vigour, and youthful happiness, attracted some wistful glances from under the toil-worn, sun-burnt brows of these peasant people, about whom I was so curious. Our enjoyment was so frank and honest, that it pleased even the unenjoying bystanders, and all the young waiters at the inn, who shook their heads at my elaborately conned questions in German, and drove me desperate with the voluble and anxious explanations of which I could not understand a word, had now a French dictionary on the side-table in the *salle*, which some one was always studying for my especial benefit; and what with smiles and signs, and my English-French, and their newly acquired phrases, we managed to do a little conversation sometimes—though whether I or my young attendants would have sounded most barbarous to a Parisian ear, I cannot tell—though, I dare say the palm would have been given to me.

And though my dress was quite plain, and we flattered ourselves that it was not easy to find

out, that this was our wedding tour, it was strange what a sympathetic consciousness every one seemed to have that I was a bride. The people were all so wonderfully kind to us. We travelled in the simplest way without either maid or man—we had nothing to limit or restrain us, no need to be at any certain place by any certain day, no necessity to please any one's convenience but our own; so we rambled on through these old picturesque streets, the bright autumn day floating unnoted over our heads, and life running on with us in an enchanted stream. There was the chill of early winter in the air already, and in those deep narrow lanes, where the paths looked like a deep cut through the houses, rather than a road, on each side of which they had been built, were parties of wood-sellers chopping up into lengths for fuel great branches and limbs of trees. Everybody seemed to be laying in their winter stock—the streets resounded with the ringing of the hatchet, the German jokes and gossip of the operators, and the hoarse rattle of

the rope or chain by which the loaded bucket was drawn up to the highest story, the store-room of these antique houses. As we threaded the deep alleys arm in arm, catching glimpses of interiors and visions of homely housewifery, we caught many smiling and kindly glances—and I do not doubt that many a brown little woman called from the door to her mother when she saw us coming, that here were the young Englishers again—for we had store of kreutzers and zwanzigers, and these small people very soon found it out.

We had just emerged upon one of the principal streets, when Harry uttered a surprised and impatient exclamation, and turned me hastily round again, to go in another direction. "What is the matter?" cried I, in alarm. "Nothing," he said quietly, "only a great bore whom I knew when I was last in Germany. Here, Hester, let's avoid him if we can."

We turned up a steep street leading to one of the gates of the town, and Harry hurried me along at a great pace. "We are running

away," said I laughing, and out of breath. "You are a true Englishman, Harry—you flee before a bore when you would face an enemy; who is this formidable stranger?"

"He is a professor at Bonn," said Harry, in a disturbed and uneasy tone. "I was there some time, you know—and knew him pretty well; but if he finds us out here, we shall never get rid of him, unless we leave the town in desperation. Come Hester, a race for it! you are not too old or too sedate for that. An army of bores would conquer with a look, like Cæsar—nothing could stand before them. Come, Hester!"

We ran across the bridge of planks, which stretched over the peaceful moat, now a garden of rich verdure, full of tobacco plants and plum-trees, from the Thiergartner Thor. Then we continued our ramble without the walls. At a little distance was a peaceful old churchyard, where some great people were lying, and where many unknown people slept very quietly with love-wreaths and scattered flowers over

their humble tomb-stones. Some one had been laid down in that quiet bed even now, and we two, in our youth and flush of happiness stood by, and saw the flowers showered down in handfuls and basketfuls upon the last enclosure of humanity. The rude earth was not thrown in till this sweet bright coverlid lay thick and soft upon the buried one—buried in flowers. We came away very softly from this scene—it touched our hearts, and awed us with a sense of the uncertain tenure of our great happiness. We clung close to each other, and went on with subdued steps saying nothing; and there on our way, at regular intervals, were those rude frames of masonry, enclosing each its piece of solemn sculpture, its groups of Jews and Romans looking on, and its one grand central figure, thorn-crowned and bearing the cross. I remember the strange emotion which crept upon me as we went along this sunny road. I had heard of the great sorrows of life, with the hearing of the ear, but I knew them not—and it struck me with a dull and strange wonder to

see this representation of the mortal agony which purchased life and hope and comfort for this latter world. I shrank closer to my husband and clasped his arm, and turned my eyes from those dark and antique pictures. I knew not Him who stooped under his tremendous burden, in this sublime and voluntary anguish. I was awestruck at the thought, but I turned away from it. I was glad to talk again of what we had been seeing, of where we were to go next. We were going back to our hotel in the first place—and as we returned by another gate, I woke once more to amusement, when I saw how jealously Harry looked about, to see if his bore was still in our way.

And as it happened, when we had almost reached our inn, and turned a sharp corner on our way to it, we suddenly met this dreaded stranger face to face; there was no escaping then; after a moment's pause, he rushed upon Harry with the warmest salutations, addressed him in very deliberate and laborious English by his present name, which he called

Soutcote, and seemed quite to claim the standing of an old friend.

I was amused, yet I was annoyed, at Harry's appearance and manner. He was more than constrained, he was embarrassed, one moment cordial, the other cold and repellant—and though he submitted to an affectionate greeting himself, it was in the proudest and briefest manner in the world that he introduced me. My new acquaintance was a middle-aged gentleman, abundantly bearded, with an immense cloak over his arm, and an odour of cigars about his whole person—but that odour of cigars was in the very atmosphere—I am sorry to confess that even Harry had it—and the Professor had bright twinkling sensible eyes, and his face, though it was large and sallow, was good-humoured and pleasant, so much as you could see of it, from its forest of hair. He did not look at all like a bore, and he spoke very good slow English, and I was surprised at Harry's dislike of him. He asked where we were living, and with a very bad grace

Harry told him; then he volunteered to call on us. I had to answer myself that we should be glad to see him, for Harry did not say a word; and then he apologized for some immediate engagement he had, and went away.

"He does not seem a bore," said I, "why did you run away from him, Harry? and if you only give him time enough, he speaks very good English. It is pleasant to hear some one speaking English. I hope he will come to night."

"Oh inconsistent womankind!" said Harry, hiding a look of great annoyance under a smile, "how long is it since you told me that you liked to be isolated from all the world, and that it was very pleasant for two people to have a language all to themselves."

"That was a week ago," I said—"and I like it still, and yet I like to hear somebody speak English; why do you dislike him? I think he looks very pleasant for a German. You ought to be glad to have some one else to speak to than always me."

"Do you judge by yourself?" said Harry, smiling, "as for me, Hester, I am no more tired of our *tête-à-tête* than I was the day we left Cambridge—so pray be thankful on your own account and not on mine."

"Are you vexed, Harry?" asked I.

"I am annoyed to have this presuming intruder thrust upon us," said Harry. "I know he is not easily discouraged, and I *did* know him very well, and went to his house, so that I should not like quite to be rude to him; and foreigners are so ignorant of our English habits—in England, your friend would understand that people who have only been three weeks married, prefer their own society to anybody else's; but everything is so different here."

"Perhaps he does not know how short a time it is," said I, "but he called you Southcote, Harry; did you write to him, or how does he know?"

"Oh! from the papers, of course," said Harry, hurriedly, "you know what linguists

these Germans are, and how they like to shew their proficiency in our language: and, of course, there are lots of English fellows in Bonn; and where there are English, there is generally a *Times*. Why, the Herr professor has become quite a hero, Hester; come in and dine, and forget that our solitude has been disturbed; what a bloom you have got—I think they will vote me thanks when I take you home."

So speaking, Harry hastened me in to arrange my dress. I could not understand his embarrassment, his perplexity, his dislike of the stranger. Why receive him less cordially than he had been used to do? why introduce him to me so stiffly? a person who knew so much about him, that he was even aware of his change of name, though he did not seem equally aware of his marriage. It was very odd altogether—my curiosity was piqued, and I think I should have been very much disappointed if the stranger had not come that night.

We had another long ramble after dinner—

for our hotel apartments, great gaunt rooms, with rows of many windows, and scanty scattered morsels of furniture, were not very attractive—and when we finally came in again I was very tired. Harry wrapped my shawl round me, had a crackling, explosive wood fire lighted in the stove, made me rest upon the sofa, and finally told me that he would "take a turn" for ten minutes and have a cigar. I was a little disappointed—he seldom did it, and I did not like to be without him, even for ten minutes; however I was reasonable, and let him go away.

When he was gone, I lay quite still in the great darkening room; there were five windows in it, parallel lines of dull light coming in over the high steep roof of a house opposite, where there were half a dozen stories of attic windows, like a flight of steps upon the giddy incline of those red mossed tiles. The whole five only made the twilight visible, and disclosed in shadow the parallel lines of darkness in the spaces between them; and the great green porcelain

stove near which I lay, gave no light, but only startling reports of sound to the vacant solitary apartment. I was glad to hear the crackling of the wood—it was "company" to me—and I began to think over Alice's last letter, with its consolatory assurance that my father was well. He wrote himself, but his letters said nothing of his health, and I was very glad of the odd upside down epistle of Alice, which told me plainly in so many words what I wanted to know. In another week, we were to go home, but Harry had said nothing yet of where we were to go to; he had received no letter from Mr. Osborne, about the house, and I concluded we would go first to Cambridge, and there find a place for ourselves.

It brought the colour to my cheek to think of going home with Harry, and taking my husband with me to the dwelling of my youth. I was shy of my father and Alice, under my new circumstances. If I had the first meeting over, I did not think I would care for the rest—but the first meeting was a very embarrassing

thought. I was occupying myself with boding of these pleasant troubles, when I heard voices approaching the door; the Herr Professor's solemn English, and Harry's tones, franker and less embarrassed than before. I got up hastily, and they entered; the stranger came and took a seat by me; he began to tell me he had once been in London, and what a wonderful place he thought it; his manner of speaking was amusing to me—it was very slow, as if every word had to be done as he went on—but it was very good English withstanding, and not merely German done into English words. And the matter was very good, sprightly and sensible; and I was very much amused by his odd observations upon our habits, and the strange twist the most familiar things acquired when looked at through his foreign spectacles. He had a great deal of quiet humour, and made quaint grave remarks, at which it was very hard to keep one's gravity. I thought he was the last person in the world whom any one could call a bore.

All this time Harry sat nervous and restless, with a flush upon his face, taking little part in the conversation; but watching the very lips of the stranger, as it seemed to me, to perceive the words they formed before he uttered them. I was very anxious that he should speak rather of Harry, than of London. I should have liked so much to hear if he was very popular among his companions, and very clever as a student; but when I saw how nervous and fidgetty Harry was, I did not like to ask, and sat in discomfort and strange watchfulness, my attention roused to every word the Professor said. I could not perceive that he said anything of importance, but I really was very much disturbed and troubled by the look of Harry.

When suddenly the stranger turned round and began to speak to him in German. Why in German? when he could speak English perfectly well, and evidently liked to exhibit his acquirements; this put the climax to my astonishment—and it did more than that—it woke a vague pang in my heart, unknown before,

which I suppose was that bitter thing called jealousy; had Harry gone out on purpose to meet and warn him; was it at Harry's request, and that I might not understand that they spoke in German? A sudden suspiciousness sprang up within me—was there, indeed, some secret which Harry did not want me to know? I who would have counted it the greatest hardship in the world to have anything to conceal from him.

I sank into sudden and immediate silence—I watched Harry. I was mortified, grieved, humiliated—I could have left the room and gone away somewhere to cry by myself; but this would only make matters worse, and I did not wish Harry to think me unreasonable or exacting. But he saw that I grew very pale, he saw the tears in my eyes, and how firmly my hands clasped each other. He suddenly said something in English—the stranger answered, and this cause of distress to me was gone; but now the Professor spoke of having visited Harry in England.

"And that house you were speaking of," said the German, "that, ah!—I know not your names—did you never go to live in it again?"

"No, no, I have never been there," said Harry, hastily, "a place I was thinking of—of settling in, Hester," he explained to me in a very timid way. "When you are next in England you must see a true English home, Professor—no bachelor's quarters now."

"Ah, my young friend, I have not forgot what you did say about *la belle cousine*," said the Professor, with a smile at me.

I sat as still as if I had been made of stone. I saw Harry's face flush with a violent colour; but no colour came to my cheek—I felt cold, rigid, desolate. I shivered over all my frame with the chill at my heart. For he had said so often that I was the only one who had ever entered his heart—that he had known no love of any kind till he knew me. Alas! were these all

vain words—the common deceits of the world—and what was I to believe or trust in, if my faith failed in Harry? I tried to believe it was some foolish jest, but though I might have persuaded myself so from the unconscious smile of the Professor, there was guilt on Harry's brow. I did not change my position in the slightest degree. I sat very still, scarcely drawing my breath. The momentary pause that followed was an age to me. While the silence lasted, I had already tried to persuade myself that whatever might have been, Harry loved *me* only now—but I could not do it—I was sick to my very heart.

I heard him dash into conversation again, into talk upon general subjects, vague and uninteresting. I listened to it all with the most absorbing interest, to find something more on this one point if I could. Then, by and bye, the stranger went away. I bade him good night mechanically, and sat still, hearing the wood crackling in the stove, and Harry's footsteps as he returned from

the door. He came in, and sat down beside me on the sofa. He took my cold hand and clasped it between his. He said "Hester—Hester—Hester!" every time more tenderly, till I could bear it no longer, and burst into tears.

"Oh, Harry! you might have told me," I exclaimed passionately; "you might have said that you cared for some one else before you cared for me!"

"It would have been false, if I had said so, Hester," he answered me in a very low earnest tone.

"Oh, Harry, Harry! do not deceive me now," I said, making a great effort to keep down a sob.

He drew me close to him, and made me lean upon his shoulder. "In this I never have, and never will, deceive you," he said, bending over me—"I never knew what love was till I knew you, Hester. What I say is true. See—I have no fear that you can find me out in a moment's inconstancy. My

thoughts have never wandered from you since I saw you first—and before I saw you, I was desolate and loved no one. You believe me?"

Could I refuse to believe him? I clung to him and cried, but my tears were not bitter any more. I could believe *him* surely, better than a hundred strangers; but still I lifted my head and said. "What did the Professor mean?"

"I knew he would make mischief, this meddling fellow," said Harry. "Hester! do not distrust me, at least on this point, when I say I cannot tell you yet what he means. I *have* a confession to make, and a story to tell—it is so, indeed, I cannot deny it. But wait till we get to England—wait till we are at home; you will trust me for a few days longer?—say you will?"

"I have trusted you implicitly, everything you have done and said until now," said I almost with a groan.

He kissed my hand with touching humility.

"You have, Hester, I know you have," he said under his breath—but he said no more—not a word of explanation—not a single regret—not a hint of what I was to look for when he told me his story—his story! what could it be?

For some time we sat in silence, side by side, listening to the wind without, and to the roaring and crackling of the wood in the stove. We did not look at each other. For the first time, we were embarrassed and uneasy. We had no quarrel—no disagreement—but there was something between us; something—one of those shadowy barriers that struck a sense of individual existence and separateness for the first time to our hearts. We were checked upon our course of cordial and perfect unity. We began an anxious endeavour to make conversation for each other—it did not flow freely as it had done, nor was this the charmed silence in which only last night we had been delighted to sit. The wind whistled drearily about the

house, and rattled at the windows. "I hope we shall have calm weather to cross the channel," said Harry; and then we began to discuss how and when we were to go home.

Yes—the charm of our rambling was gone; all my desire now, was to get home to know what this confession was, which Harry had to make to me. It was not the confession I had dreaded —it was not that somebody else had ever been as dear to him as I was now—what could it be? He spoke of it no more, but left it to my imagination without a word. My imagination puzzled and bewildered, could make nothing of the mystery—could he, in his early youth, have done something very *wrong?* No, it was impossible, I could not credit that of Harry. I was entirely at fault—and I think before an hour was over I would gladly have undertaken to forgive him beforehand, and chase the nightmare away. But he did not seem able to forget it; it was a bigger nightmare to him than to me. He was very kind, very loving and tender; but

there was a deprecation in his manner which troubled me exceedingly. How I longed now that this Dutch Professor had never broken in upon our happy days! How annoyed I was at my own childish perversity, my opposition to Harry because I thought he was not cordial to the stranger! What concern had I with the stranger? and he had repaid me by bringing the first blank into our joyous intercourse—the first secret between our hearts.

Before the evening was spent, we were a little better. It made me miserable to see Harry looking unhappy and constrained. We tacitly avoided all reference which could touch upon this mystery, and arranged and re-arranged our journey home, or "to England," as we said. I did not ask where we should go to, nor did he say—and so ended the first tedious evening of our married life.

THE SECOND DAY.

It was the middle of October, stormy, cloudy, a searching chill, disconsolate day. It had been wet in the morning, and the low lands near Calais were flooded with the previous rains; everything on shore was as gloomy and uncomfortable as could be; and the decks of the little steamer were wet with sea water, as we stepped on board of her in the deceitful harbour of Calais, where the wild sea without was beyond our reach or ken. When we cleared the harbour and made our first wild plunge amid the raging lions without, I never will forget what a shock it gave me. Crossing these wild little

straits on our way to the continent had been my first voyage—this was only my second—and I thought these monstrous waves which rolled up to us, defiant and boastful like Goliath, were to swallow up in an instant our brave little David, the small stout straining sea-boat, which bore our lives and our hopes within a hair's-breadth of destruction—as I thought. "Take the lady below, Sir—she can't be no worse nor ill there," said a seaman pithily, as he rolled past us with a mop and bucket, with which they vainly attempted to dry the flooded deck. I was so much worse than ill here, that I was drenched with the dashing of the sea; but the man did not know with what a solemn expectation I waited, looked to be devoured and engulfed every moment by some invading wave.

Yet in spite of all, we reached the opposite shore in safety, and stood once more upon English ground—then we rested for a little and changed our wet dresses, and Harry pressed and entreated me to take refreshment; I made an effort to please him, but he took nothing him-

self; he looked very much agitated, though he suppressed his feelings anxiously. For a few days we had greatly regained our former happy freedom, and almost forgot that anything had ever come between us. I am sure it was not my fault that the feeling was revived to-day. I had made no allusion to what he was to tell me—I had even avoided speaking of the home to which we were going, lest he might think I was impatient for this secret—my mind was free, and I could forget it; but it lay on Harry's conscience and he could not.

I think the storm had pleased him while we were on the water, for it chimed in with his own excitement; but when we landed—when we had to rest and refresh ourselves, and there was an hour or two to wait for a train, my heart ached for Harry. He looked so restless, so agitated, so unhappy. I kept by him constantly, yet I sometimes feared that I rather aggravated than soothed his emotion by any tenderness, I showed him. He looked so grateful for it, that I felt almost injured by his thankful-

ness. He turned such wistful looks upon me too, as if he doubted whether I ever would look upon him or speak to him as I did now, after this day. The importance he seemed to attach to it, gave his mystery a new weight in my eyes. I had begun to grow familiar with it—to think it must be nothing and despise it; but it was impossible to do that when I saw the excitement under which Harry was labouring. What could it be? Nay, if it was indeed something very bad he had done in some former time—which was the most probable thing I could think of—that was nothing to me—that could never estrange us from each other. And when we set out again upon our journey, and rushed away with giant strides to London, I pleased myself thinking how I would laugh at his fears when I really heard his story—how I would upbraid him for believing that anything could ever come between us—how I would charm him back into his old self with tenderer words than I had ever spoken yet. We sat opposite each other, yet our eyes very seldom

met. He was cogitating in doubt and trouble. I was thinking of him very lovingly—how good he was—how strange that he ever could do wrong—how impossible that either wrong or right should part him and me. My heart swelled when I recollected all his tender care of me—how, though I was his wife I had never for a moment been divested of that delicate and reverent honour with which he surrounded me in the days of our betrothal. I felt that I could trust to him as a child trusts, without even wishing to find out his secret; and I rejoiced to think how soon I could dissipate the cloud that was over him, when the crisis really came.

We had another little interval of waiting in London, and then set out again for Cambridge, as I thought. It was now getting late, and the day declined rapidly. Harry did not seem able to speak to me; he sat by my side, so that I could no longer see his face, and we travelled on in silence, rushing through the gathering darkness; every moment Harry's

excitement seemed to grow and increase. He took my hand, and held it tight for a moment—then he released it to clasp and strain his own together; sometimes he turned to me as if just on the point of making his confession, whatever that confession might be—but immediately repented and turned away again. I did all I could to soothe him, but vainly as it seemed—and had it not been for my perfect conviction that I had but to hear this story, to convince him that nothing possible could stand between us, I scarcely could have endured that rapid and silent journey, full of expectation as it was. At length we stopped at a little unimportant station on the way. "We get out here, Hester," said Harry, in a stifled breathless voice, as he helped me to alight; his hand was burning as if with fever, and the light of the lamps showed me the white cloud of excitement on his face. Outside the station, a carriage was waiting for us. "You have found a house then, Harry? —why did not you tell me?" I said, as he

handed me into it. "Did you mean it for a surprise?" "Yes," he said, hoarsely; I saw he was not able to say any more. I was very sorry for him. I took his hand, which was now cold, and warmed it between my own. I could not help remonstrating with him. I could not bear it any longer.

"Harry," said I, "why are you so much troubled? have you no confidence at all in me? do you forget what I am—your wife? I cannot think anything would disturb you so much, except something *wrong*—but is it my place to sit in judgment upon any wrong you may have done? It will be hard for me to believe it. I would believe no one but yourself on such a subject—and whatever it is, it can make no difference with me. Harry! don't turn away from me—don't let us be separated; you make me very anxious; yet I would rather not know what it is that troubles you so. I am not going home to be a punishment or a judge upon you—you forget I am your wife, Harry."

But Harry only groaned; it was remorse, compunction, that was in his heart. He repeated my last words wildly, with passionate exaggerated tones of fondness. His angel, he called me; much troubled as I was, I smiled at the name—for I was honest enough to know that there was very little, even of the earthly angel, about me.

And so we drove on; the gliding silent motion of the carriage seemed very subdued and gentle after the rush of the railway—on through dark silent hedgeless roads, over the wide level country, which stretched around us one vast dull plain under the shadow of the night. It was my own country I saw—and I put out my hand from the carriage window to feel the fresh wind, which came over miles and miles of these broad flats, unbroken by any obstacle. Not a hedgerow, scarcely a tree, and neither passenger upon the way nor human habitation, was to be seen in the darkness—nothing but the dark soil, the wide, wide indescribable distance, the fresh breeze and the

dim sky. The very road we were on, was a level straightforward line, which seemed to have no turnings, but to go blindly forward, uninterrupted, as if it went to the end of the world. All the charm which I used to feel in my native locality returned upon me; space, and breadth, and freedom almost infinite, was in this land which people called monotonous and dreary. My spirit rose, my heart beat high. I felt my breast expand to the fresh wind—but when I turned to Harry—Harry seemed quite unmoved by it; he was still buried in his own dark thoughts.

The carriage was a private one, luxuriously fitted up, and I thought the servants recognised him as servants recognise their master; but I had never been told that he was rich enough for this, and it joined with the greater mystery to puzzle me. When I looked out again, I began to think the way quite familiar to my eyes: that was not unlikely, being in Cambridgeshire—but now it grew *strangely* familiar, even in the darkness. Could the

house Harry had taken be near Cottiswoode?—my heart beat still louder at the thought. I scarcely knew whether it pleased or vexed me; yet I thought I should have pleasure in showing Edgar Southcote how independent of jealousy or any mean feeling Harry's wife could be. I looked out eagerly, recognising now a tree and now a cottage—we were surely near the hamlet. Harry, too, stirred in his corner; I thought he watched me, but I was full of old thoughts and did not speak to him. Yes! there were the elm-trees—the old avenue. Then I drew back in my seat with tears in my eyes; eager as I was, I could not look out, when we were passing so near my own old home.

The shadows of great trees were over us; but I had leaned back in my corner, and did not note them. Yes! I remembered that the public road crossed the very end of that stately grand old avenue—how slowly we were passing it! how long the over-arching branches, shadowed the carriage! and

the air grew closer, as if something interrupted it very near. I did not look up, a strange fascination overpowered me—a moment more, and the carriage wheeled round into an open space and stopped. Almost before they drew up, Harry leaped from my side. Then he came round, threw the door open, held out his arms to me to lift me out—how his arms trembled!—how hot his breath came upon my cheek!—I could scarcely recognise his hurried, trembling, agitated vocie, "Hester—welcome home!"

Home!—the great hall door stood open—the moon came out from behind a cloud to throw a momentary gleam upon the house. Home! I thrust him away, and sprang to the ground without his aid. He stood where I had left him, drawing back, following me with his eyes, and pale as marble. I stood alone gazing up at the sculptured emblems upon the door. In a moment, in a flood of despair and bitterness, the truth rushed upon me. I had been trapped and

betrayed—deceived like a fool—and every one had known the snare but I. I saw it all at a glance—I was his wife—his wife! and he had brought me home.

In that wild moment, I cannot tell the impulses of frenzy which possessed me. To escape—to rush away from him, over the pathless, featureless country—through the darkness and the night—to be lost somewhere for ever and for ever, never to come to his knowledge more—to die upon this threshold and never enter it. It was vain! I was roused to a sense of my true circumstances when I saw a band of servants curtseying and gaping at me in the hall. My pride came to my aid, my very passion supported me. I went in with a firm deliberate step, bowing to them, and passed on to the room which had been our dining-parlour, and from which there came a glimmer of light. I had not looked towards him, but I heard his step following me. I entered the room—it was very bright and

cheerful, well-lighted with a ruddy fire—and tea was upon the table. The glow of warmth and comfort in it struck me with an indignant sense of my own sudden misery. He had put me without the pale of enjoyment, I thought, for ever.

I did not take off my bonnet—I stood in the glow of the firelight, turning my face to him as he came eagerly up to me. I stopped him as he began to speak. "There is no need—no need!" said I, "I see your mystery—pray do not speak to me—do not drive me mad to-night."

He turned away clasping his hands with a passionate exclamation—then he came back: "I deserve your reproaches, Hester, do not spare them! but think what you said to me not half an hour ago—you are my wife."

"Your wife—your wife—yes! there is the sting," I said with a wild outburst; "his wife, and it is for ever!"

He went away blindly from me to the

other end of the room, and threw himself down in a chair. I saw his suffering, but it did not move me. I thought of nothing but my own wrong—a hard, cold, desperate indifference to every one else seemed to come upon me. I saw myself tricked, cheated, despised. Mr. Osborne, Alice, my father—strange and impossible though the conjunction was—I almost thought I saw them altogether, smiling at me. I could have gnashed my teeth when I thought how conscious every one else was—how miserably blind was I. I could have thrown myself on the floor and dashed my hot brow against the hearth—*his* hearth—*his* home—*his* household sanctuary. But I rejected and hated it—it was not mine.

I cannot tell how long I stood thus, he sitting far apart from me saying nothing—it might have been hours—it might have been only moments—I cannot tell. I think it was the falling of some ashes from the fire upon the hearth which roused me; the trivial common

sound brought a strange awakening to my misery. I went and rang the bell; as I did so, he looked up at me wistfully. "It is only for some one to show me my room," I said. "May not I do that, Hester?" he asked. I think, perhaps, though it is a strange ungenerous thing to say so, that had he been less overpowered, less dejected, had he boldly entered upon the subject then, and compelled me to go over it, step by step, I would not have been so bitter against him; but he was disarmed and broken down, less by my reproaches than by his own feeling of guilt.

"Thank you, I shall prefer a servant," said I, and when the woman came, I followed her upstairs. She led me to my own old room, the last room I had left when we went away from Cottiswoode. My first glance at it showed me that it was furnished with the greatest care and elegance, and the door of a little room adjoining, which had been a lumber room in our time, was open, and from it came a glimpse of firelight; in the bedchamber, too,

there was a fire, and everything in it looked so bright, so pure and cheerful, that I could not glance anywhere without an aggravation of bitterness—to place *me* here, was like placing a revolted and defying spirit in some peaceful bower of heaven.

The servant who conducted me, was a fresh young country woman, five or six years my senior. In the preoccupation of my own thoughts, I scarcely looked at her, but she seemed to linger as if for a recognition; at last she spoke. "I'm Amy Whitehead, please Miss—Madam," she said, confused and blushing, "and my old uncle, Ma'am, that was at the Hall afore, he's been waiting, please, ever since we heard the news, to know when you was coming home."

"Another time—another time, Amy," said I, hurriedly, half-stifled with the sobs which I could restrain no longer. "Tell him I remember him very well—and you too; but I am fatigued and want rest to-night; and tell your Master, Amy, that I am about to go

to rest, and will not come down stairs again."

She went away, looking surprised and a little disconcerted. I daresay this was strangely unlike Amy's simple notions of the home-coming of a bride. When I was alone, I went to the glass and looked in my own face. I was very pale, jaded, and wretched-looking; but it was myself—still myself and no other. This half hour's misery had made no volcanic sign upon my face. I loosed off my bonnet slowly, and all my wrappers—those shawls which he had arranged round me so carefully—I flung them on the floor where I stood. I did not know how to give some vent, to seek some expression for my wretchedness. It pressed upon my heart and brain, with a close and terrible pressure; a great physical shock would have been a relief to me. I could have leaped over a precipice, or plunged into a river for ease to my crowding, thronging thoughts.

Then I threw myself down in a chair by the fire, and tried to be still. I could not be still.

I rose and wandered through the rooms; they were furnished with the most careful regard to all my tastes and preferences. I saw that, but when I saw it, it only increased my bitterness; the dressing-room within, the little happy confidential room, scared me away with its look of home and comfort. At last, I opened a window and looked out upon the night; the same jessamine dropped its leaflets on the window-sill, the same moaning wandering winds came upon my face, as those I had known of old. It had begun to rain, and I listened to the heavy drops falling among the scanty autumn foliage, and bearing down with them in their progress, showers of yellow leaves; and now and then the fitful blast dashed the rain into my face, as I looked out upon the dark trees—the dark indistinct country—the vast world of darkness and space before me. The chill air and the rain refreshed me—I leaned far out that the shower might beat upon my head, and then I thought I was able to return to my seat and to be calm.

Yes! I was in Cottiswoode. I was Edgar Southcote's wife; at this thought my heart burned. I cannot express the fiery glow of pain which overpowered me by any other words. Since I entered this fatal house, I seemed to have lost sight of Harry. Harry my tender wooer, my loving bridegroom, the nearest and dearest of all who were near and dear to me, had disappeared like a dream. In his place stood my scorned and rejected cousin, he whose compassion had sought me out to make amends to me for a lost inheritance. A hundred circumstances came upon my mind now to direct suspicion to him; his desire to take our name, oh! heaven protect us! *my* name! it was no suggestion of his love—it was a mean and paltry lie! And he had succeeded—there was the sting—and my father's words came back upon me with a strange significance, but only to place my father among the other conspirators against my place. The bond of our marriage lay upon our hearts and souls; for ever and for ever—for ever and for ever; not even in thought

or for a moment could I deliver myself from this bondage—even when I died I would belong to him—and the very name upon my grave-stone would be that of Edgar Southcote's wife.

I was pacing up and down steadily, holding my hands clasped together. I could not be still and think of these things. I could not remember with composure where I was, and how I had been brought here. I went to the window again, and as I raised my hand to my face, I felt upon my neck the little chain with my mother's miniature—with a wild access of indignation I snatched it off; now I understood why it was that they connected him with my mother—that they found in my circumstances some resemblance to those of my father's shipwrecked life. I did not dash it now out of my hand as I was minded to do; with trembling fingers I put it away, out of my reach, where the placid smile of that mild face could not drive me wild again. What could she or such as she understand of this misery which I was enduring now?

At this moment some one knocked lightly at the door. I went at once and opened it—it was himself. I looked full at him to find out how I could have been deceived. This was not my Harry—Harry was nothing but an ideal, and he was gone—this was the boy, my cousin, whom I had met upon the road seven years ago, with his stooping figure and his timid step. Once more in my injured and passionate strength, full of bitter resentment and proud scorn, I stood firm by Edgar Southcote—and he humbled, downcast, self-reproachful, stood like a culprit before me.

"May I come in, Hester?" he asked.

I gave way to him in a moment—but I could not do it without a bitter word. "You are the master of the house—I have no right to admit, or to exclude any one here."

He held up his hands with a wild deprecating gesture. "Am I not sufficiently punished?" he said, "If I was wrong—criminal—think of what the circumstances were, Hester—can your heart find no excuse for me?—and see what my

punishment is already. Instead of the natural joy which a man looks for, when he carries his bride home, I have anticipated this day with terror—and my fears are more than realized. Have I become a different person from him to whom you said this very night, 'I am your wife?' Am not I the same man you promised your heart and love to? the same with whom you left your father's house? Hester! I have deceived you—I do not try to make my fault less. Say it was a deliberate premeditated fault—I do not deny it—but I am not changed. Condemn *it*, but be merciful to me."

"No, you are not the same man," I answered, "you are not Harry—you are Edgar Southcote—I never gave either hand or heart to you; I gave them to one who was not capable of fraud—who knew nothing of a lie—he is gone and dead, and I will never find him more either in heaven or earth; you have killed my Harry—you have killed my heart within me. I never molested you—I never appealed to you for pity—I had forgotten Cottiswoode, it was nothing to me.

Why did you come with your false compassion to steal away my hopes, and my heart, and my youth?"

"Compassion, Hester? where is there any compassion in the matter?" he exclaimed; "you show none to me."

"No—I only want justice," said I; "oh! I know you have been generous—I know it was a kind meaning, a charitable impulse, to restore to me my father's land. Do not let us speak of it, if I am to keep my reason now; I fancied such a thing could never happen to *me*. I did not think I could have been so humiliated. I trusted you—I trusted you with all my heart! Will you let me stay here, and leave me to myself? I want to collect myself—to think of what is all over and past, and of what remains"

"What remains? what will you do, Hester?" he cried, growing very pale.

But I could not tell—I looked round me with a dreary desolate search for something to support me. I had no one to flee to—not one in all the world. What a change since yester-

day—since this morning—when I had everything in having him!

I remember that he came to me and kissed my hand—that he bent over it, and intreated me to forgive him; that I turned away, and would not look at him, nor listen, with a hard and heartless obduracy, and that then he said, "Good-night—good-night!" and slowly went away.

When I was alone, my desolation, my wretchedness, my solitude burst upon me in an agony—he had gone away—he had granted my petition—I was alone! I stood for a long time quite silent, where he had left me—then I went back to my chair. I fancied the very foundations of the earth were breaking up; I had no longer any one to trust to; every one had deceived me, every creature I loved or cared for was in the conspiracy. Even my father's suspicions must have come to certainty before I left him—yet nobody had warned me. Oh! it was cruel! cruel! for thus it came about that I had no one to go to in my distress, no one to

seek refuge with—that my impulse was to turn away from all my friends, to seek a dreary shelter in this loneliness, which struck to my heart to-night, with such a terrible pang. What was I to do?

I could not think of that—my mind went back and back again to what was past. I began to follow out the evidences, the certainties which made it clear to Alice, and to my father, and which ought to have made it clear to me. I had no wish to return to *them*. I was indifferent to everything; I only felt that in a moment a bitter antagonism had sprung up between him and me—that, according to our love, would be our enmity and opposition, and that even in our variance and strife, and with this unforgiven wrong between us, we were bound to each other for ever.

All this night, when I thought to have been so happy, I sat alone in that chair. At last, when it grew late, and the fire burned low, and I felt the chill of the night, my fatigue overpowered me, and I fell asleep. My dreams

were of vague distress and tribulation, misfortune and misery, which I could not comprehend; but when I awoke, I found myself laid on the bed, carefully wrapped up, though still dressed, and the gray light of dawn coming in through the windows. I could not recollect myself for the moment, nor how I had come to be here; but when I lifted my head, I saw him seated where I had seated myself last night, bending over a bright fire, with his arms supporting his head. When he heard me stir, he looked up; *he* had not been sleeping to-night, although I had—and then I recollected all that had passed, and that it was he who must have lifted me here, and covered me so carefully. His face was pale now, and his eyes dark and heavy; he seemed almost as listless and indifferent as I was—for though he looked up, he made no advance to me.

I sprang from my rest, and threw off from me the shawls I had been wrapped in—then he rose and offered me his chair. I did not take it—we stood looking at each other; then he took

my hand and held it, and looked at me wistfully. I said a cold "Good-morning," and turned my head away. When I did that, he dropped my hand, and withdrew from me a little —and then he seemed to make an effort to command himself, and spoke to me in a voice which I scarcely recognised—so clear it was, and calm. Ah! he could be something else than an ardent, or a penitent lover; the voice of the man was new to me. I looked up at him instantly, with a respect which I could not help; but we had entered upon another day. These days of my life crowded on each other—and to this chill, real dawn, and not to the wild, passionate night which preceded it, belonged what he said.

THE THIRD DAY.

THE grey morning looked in chill and damp from the windows, the bough of jessamine fluttered upon the glass, the rain pattered on the leaves. It was the hour of night and day which is coldest, keenest, most ungenial—and we stood, together, but apart—as pale, as chill, as heavy as the morning—quieted, yet still trembling with the agitation of the night.

"There is a messenger below from Cambridge. I sent on word of our arrival last night," he said, "your father is not well and wishes to see you. I have ordered the carriage to be ready, and have been watching here till

you should awake. It is very early, but I know you will not care for the discomfort—your father has expressed a strong desire to see you immediately, and, he is very weak, they say."

"Do you mean he is dying?" I asked firmly, though I could not raise my voice above a whisper.

"I mean he is very ill. Yes, Hester! it does not become me to deceive you any more."

I turned abruptly from him, and went to put on my bonnet. He lingered, waiting for me—when I was ready, he took some of the wrappers I had worn on the journey over his arm, and went down stairs before me. The servants were astir already, and I saw breakfast prepared in the room which I had been in, last night—he held the door open for me, and involuntarily I entered—I did not say anything. Indeed, what with the dreadful bewilderment and uncertainty of my own position, and the pang of foreboding that I was only called there when my father was in extremity, I had little power to say a word—I sat down passively on the

chair he set for me by the fire, while he ordered the carriage to come round. I accepted without a word the coffee he brought me, and tried to drink it; I did not feel as if I had any will at all, but did everything mechanically, as though it were imposed upon me by a stronger will, which I could not resist. No longer the agitated youth of yesterday—the self-reproachful and unforgiven lover, whose happiness hung on my breath, and to whom I was ruthless, obdurate, and without pity—he was so different this morning that I scarcely could think him the same person. This was a man who had the sole right to think for me, to guard me, perhaps to control me, whether I would or no —I was not strong enough, at this moment, to resist his tacit and unexpressed authority. I only wondered at it vaguely in the languor and weariness which was upon me. I was worn out by last night's excitement, I had a dull terror of expectation in my mind, but I had not heart enough to be impatient. My faculties were all benumbed and torpid. At another

time, these few moments of waiting would have been agony to me—but they were not so now.

Then I heard the wheels at the door, and rose to go; he followed me closely—assisted me in, wrapped me round with the shawls he carried, and then took his place by my side—I made no remonstrance, I said nothing—I submitted to all he did with a dull acquiescence, and we drove off at a great pace. I think it did strike me for a moment how bitterly everything was changed, since I stepped from that carriage on the previous night; once more I leaned back, and did not look at the noble old elms in the avenue—the shadow of their branches over us, made my heart sick, and I closed my eyes till we were once more dashing along the free unshadowed monotonous road. A dreary and sad monotony was on those fresh, broad plains this morning. The sky was nothing but one vast cloud—the fitful, chill breeze, brought dashes of rain against the windows—the country looked like an uninhabited desert. Distance, flight,

an endless race—away, away, away—towards the skies; but it was not fleeing from my fate. My fate was here beside me, the companion of my journey—we could not escape from each other. I was his evil fortune, and he was mine.

We did not say a word all the time, though we were nearly three hours on the way. Then came the familiar Cambridge streets—then he rose and whispered something to the coachman on the box—we subdued our pace immediately, and quietly drew up at the well-known door. Our younger servant, Mary, was looking from it eagerly—when she saw us, she left it open and ran in—I suppose to say I had come. He helped me to alight, and I went in. I went slowly though I was so near. I wanted to see some one else first—some one else before I saw my father.

At the foot of the stairs, Alice met me. She came up to me, joy struggling with her gravity, to kiss and bless me, as she had been used to do. I turned away from her with a harsh and forbidding gesture, and would not let her touch

me. Her eyes filled with tears—her cheeks reddened and grew pale again. She muttered something in a confused and troubled undertone, of which I only heard the word "pardon!" and then she said in a voice, which a great effort made steady, and articulate. "Your father waits you, Miss Hester—will you come?"

I followed her in silence. I did not know what I was to say, or how to behave to my father. My heart swelled as though it would break, when I went along the familiar passages, where I had come and gone so lately in the gladness of my youth. I had a dull, heavy, throbbing pain in my forehead, over my eyes; but I followed her firmly, without a word. My father's bedchamber looked only upon the ivy covered wall of the close, and upon some gardens beyond it. The sun never came in there, and it was dim at all times; how much dimmer on this dreary morning, when there was no sunshine even on the open plains. There was a fire in the grate, but it burned dull like everything else. Before I looked at my father, I had taken in all the

little accessories around him in one glance. The bottles upon the table, the drinks they were giving him, even the gleam of the wet ivy upon the top of the wall. My father himself lay, snpported by pillows, breathing hard and painfully, and was very pale, but with a hectic spot burning on his cheek. He put out his thin white hand to me as I approached him. The diamond, a strange token of his former self, still shone upon his finger; it caught my eye in the torpor and dullness of my thoughts—and in this hour of extremity, I remember wondering why he still chose to wear this favourite ring.

"You have come home in time, Hester," he said faintly.

I put off my bonnet, and sat down beside him. My face and my heart were still quite dull. I do not think I expressed any emotion. I spoke only to Alice, and to her as coldly as if she had been a perfect stranger. "Will you tell me what he must have—show me the things; and, if you please, leave us alone."

Silently, as if she was not able to speak, she pointed out the medicines to me, and then went away. I followed her to the door, for I saw that she beckoned to me. How changed I must have been! for Alice seemed almost afraid to speak to me, whom she had been used to call her child.

"Miss Hester!" she whispered, with a faltering eager tone, and under her breath, "do not tell him—for pity's sake do not let him know what you have found out!"

I made her no answer, but closed the door and came back to his bed-side. Then I sat down again in silence. I had nothing to say to him—nothing to say to him! neither of earth nor heaven!

"What have you to tell me, Hester?" said my father, at last. "I am about leaving you—are you aware of it? do you know that this is the day which I looked forward to, when I asked you to place your fortune in my hands?"

"Yes, father!" I was stupid, sullen, dead. I

could show no feeling, for indeed I felt none yet.

"I am glad that you decided as you did, Hester," continued my father; "I have now no weight upon my conscience—no dread that I have compromised your happiness; and *you* have a protector and a home. You are happy, my love?"

"Did you say happy? oh, yes!" I said with almost a laugh; "happy, very happy, papa."

Strange as it seemed to me, he appeared contented with what I said—he made no more reference to it; he lifted my hand gently up and down in his own.

"And I am going away," he said slowly, "going away, Hester, where?"

Where? the word struck me with a strange superstitious terror. For the first time I was roused to look eagerly and inquiringly in his face.

"Not to the family grave, Hester!" he said with a smile of awful amusement—yes, amusement, there is no other word—"that is only a

stage in the journey; where am I going beyond that? Have you nothing to say?"

"Father—father!" I cried wildly, with a breathless horror.

"Ay, but you cannot pilot me!" said my father; "and by-and-bye my ears will be deaf, should all the voices in the world echo my name."

I bent over him, holding him with terror unspeakable. Little training in religion had fallen to my share; but I had the natural sentiment—the natural dread; and I forgot everything else in the deadly fear which made me cling to my father now.

"Why do you not tell me to be resigned?" said my father. "Do you know what I am setting out upon, Hester? Distance, distance, distance—vaster than anything in our moorland—a dark, solitary journey, where no one knows the way. Death! who believes in *that?* it is but an arbitrary word—one of the names we use for things we cannot comprehend; and no one tells me where is the end."

"Oh, father, father, it is in the Bible!" cried I.

"Yes, it is in the Bible. Are you afraid I do not believe it, child? I believe it—but I see no clearer for my faith," said my father. "I believe it as I believe that Columbus discovered a new world. But what is Columbus and his new world to me?"

"But, papa, the Saviour—" I said, timidly, and in an agony of terror.

"Ay, the Saviour—I believe in Him, Hester, but I do not know Him!" said my father, in a hard and painful voice. "Yes—He has gone this road, they say. *He* might take one by the hand in this mysterious journey—but I know him not."

"Let me send for some one, father," I cried; "there are, surely, some who know. Let me send for a clergyman—papa, do not refuse me. He could tell us, and he could pray."

"Telling would do me little service, Hester," said my father, faintly, with again that strange,

awful smile upon his mouth; "it is not information I want. It is—ah! breath—breath!"

A sudden spasm had seized him; he had been speaking too much, and he was worn out. I raised him up in my arms when I understood his gestures, that he might have air. How his breast heaved and panted with those terrible struggles! I supported him, but with nervous, trembling arms. I feared the sight of this mortal suffering—it was dreadful to me—for I had never seen the anguish of the bodily frame before.

When he was eased, and the spasm wore off, I laid him down exhausted. He was no longer able to speak; but as I watched him, I saw his eyes, in which shone all his mind, as clear and full as ever, untouched and independent of this malady, passing with a considerate and steady gaze from one part of the room to another. I could not comprehend this mood. Not with disquietude, nor with anxiety, did he ask "Where?" He was neither disturbed nor unhappy; he seemed to have no fear. The

smile had returned to his face; he still could be amused; and no human emotions seemed to break upon his deep, deep calm.

But I had no pleasure in seeing his composure. Horror, grief, distress, overpowered me as I sat watching him. Oh, that smile, that smile! Was this journey the only one in the world which a man could take composedly, without knowing where he was bound? I had the common youthful ideas about age, and death-beds, and death. I gave the natural awe, the natural solemnity, to the wonderful termination, transition, change—the end of our life here—the beginning of the other world. It shocked and struck me with terror, to see him lie there upon the brink of it, asking "Where?" with a smile. I remembered all the common sayings about the death of good men. I remembered Addison's call to some one to come and see how a Christian could die. I wondered if there was ostentation in this, to set against the speculative amusement with which my father had spoken. Everything

else was swept from my mind by these thoughts. I forgot the hard pressure of my own unhappiness, and it was only recalled to me for a moment when I thought of appealing to Harry, and with a shock and bitter pang recollected that I had no Harry now, but that only Edgar Southcote waited below—waited for the issue of this tragedy, to take me home.

For an hour or two after, my father lay dozing, taking no notice of me, save when I gave him his medicine. He seemed, indeed, to sleep very often for a few minutes at a time; but if I chanced to look away, when my glance returned to him, I invariably saw those open, living eyes, full of strength and understanding, noting all they saw with a perfect intelligence which struck me strangely. His mind was not dying. I have never seen anything that gave me such a wonderful idea of life and vigour as those glances from my father's death-bed. He looked what was approaching in the face, and quailed not at it. Change was before him, not conclusion. With his living soul he looked

into a vague, vast future, and knew not what it was; but Death, as he said, was but an arbitrary term—it meant nothing to that inquiring, speculative, active soul.

After a long interval, he seemed to revive, and strengthen, and turned his eyes upon me again.

"And you are happy, Hester—are you happy?" he said, looking closely in my face.

I turned my eyes away—I think it was the first lie I had ever told—and I said only:

"Yes!"

But he was wandering once more among his own thoughts, and heeded not my looks, nor what they meant.

"Life is a strange problem," he said, with the sombre shadow which it used to wear, returning upon his face. "I am about to find the solution of it, Hester; all my existence centres in one event. I have suffered one act to overshadow my best years—that was my great error—what a fool I was! because I

failed in one thing, I threw everything away."

"Because your failure in that one thing poisoned all your life!" I exclaimed, "oh! do not blame yourself, father! the blame did not lie with you."

"What was that to me if the penalty did," said my father, in his old reasoning tone—a tone which contrasted so strangely with the feeble voice, and the great weakness in which he spoke. "One act should not poison life, Hester! not even for a woman, how much less for a man. There are greater things in this world than marrying, or giving in marriage."

He spoke with an emphasis of scorn, which made me tremble more and more. Alas! I saw that still in his very heart rankled this poisoned sorrow; and I shuddered to think that the same doom was mine—that I would carry to my death this same bitterness—that my life was already overshadowed as his had been, and that I was ready, like him, to throw everything away.

"If it should be that I am to find out the wherefore of these dark mysteries; if that is the congenial occupation in the place whither I go;" he paused suddenly when he had said so much—though I watched him eagerly, and listened, he did not continue. He fell into immediate silence, and again he began to sleep.

The confidence with which he spoke to me was strange. I scarcely could understand it—perhaps his weakness had some share in it, perhaps my absence—and it was the first time I ever had been absent from home—had inclined his heart towards his only child; and perhaps he could not help this audible wandering of his thoughts, as strength and life failed him, and he gathered all his powers to his heart to keep his identity—to be himself. When he was awake and I saw his eyes, I scarcely could believe in what was coming; but when he slept, I thought I could see moment by moment how the current ebbed and ebbed away.

During one of those intervals of sleep, the

doctor came in, and with him Mr. Osborne. With that practised scientific eye, which it is so dreadful to mark upon our dearest ones, the doctor looked at him, and shook his head. He was lying so solemnly with his closed eyes, and not a movement in his frame, so pale now, so feeble, so perfectly at rest, that a pang of momentary terror struck to my heart; but he was not gone. He did not wake till the doctor had gone away, and Mr. Osborne was left standing by me. I never raised my head, nor greeted him. I did not answer his whisper of satisfaction at finding me here—even by my father's bed-side, I would not meet as a friend a man who had wilfully snared and betrayed me.

When my father opened his eyes, he saw his friend by his bed-side; but his eyes were not so full nor so clear, nor so bright with life and intelligence as they had been; there was a change—he stirred nervously.

"Ha! Osborne, my good fellow!" he said "I am just setting out—any messages, eh? any word to—to—Helen."

After he had said the name, a momentary colour came to his cheek—he lifted his hand heavily, and drew it over his brow.

"What did I say? am I raving? no, no, I know you all! stay here, Helen," the diamond on his finger had caught his eye—it was I whom he was calling by that name, and already his faculties failed to distinguish it from mine, "here," he repeated, trying to draw off the ring, "here—take it from me—wear it—wear it—'tis a misfortune—keep it till you die."

I took it from him, and he seemed to sink into a stupor. I never withdrew my eyes from him. The day had come and gone while I had been watching, and now it was night. Lights were brought into the room—I felt some one come behind me, and stand there at my chair; but I did not look who it was. Oh! that silent dim death-room, with no sound in it but his breath! Mr. Osborne leaned, hiding his face, upon the pillar of the bed. I heard one suppressed sob behind me, and knew it was Alice; and I knew, too, instinctively that though I did

not see him, there was another in the room. But I never moved nor turned my head—not a tear came to my dry eye, my lips were parched and hot; neither sobbing nor weeping were possible to me. I sat still by that bed-side, in full possession of my mind and faculties. I never observed more keenly, more closely, more minutely in all my life—I felt no grief, I knew no emotion, I only watched and watched with intense attention and consciousness to see my father pass away.

And there lay he; his speech was gone from him—his voice was no more to be heard in mortal ears—his soul was within those dark closing eternal gates—he was almost away. Suddenly he opened his dim eyes, and looked about him wildly, and said "Helen!" Mr. Osborne turned to me with a rapid gesture to seek the miniature on my neck. "Let him see her—let him see her! why have you left it behind?" he said, in a whisper, which had all the effect of a loud cry. How vain it would

have been! my father's eyes closed once more in a moment—opened again to look round upon us with a scared bewildered glance—then were shut closely. I thought he had fallen asleep; but there was suddenly a movement and rustle among them all, a faint stir—I could not describe it—as if something had been accomplished. I understood what it meant—it went to my heart like a knife. Yes! it was so—it was so—I was standing among those who had wronged me, and he was gone.

I did not move though they did. Mr. Osborne came and put his hand upon my head, bade God bless me! and said, "All is well with him—all is well with him, dear child! go with Alice, this is no place for you," and Alice stole to my side and put her arm round me, and entreated "Miss Hester, darling, my own child! come and rest!"

I shook them both away; they were weeping, both of them—but not a tear came to me. I was the only one quite self-possessed. I did not say a word to either—I kept my seat, and shook

them from me when they attempted to remonstrate. No! I could not yield to their false kindness, I would rather be alone—alone! as I was indeed alone in the world.

Then *he* came to me—when I saw him approaching, I rose. "Do not say anything," I said, "if I must leave my dear father, I will go to my own room; let no one come to me. I will not be interrupted to-night."

He followed me as I went to the door—he followed me along the passage, perhaps he thought I needed his support, but I was firmer in my step than he was. I knew that his heart was yearning over me in my new grief, I knew it better than if he had told me—but my heart was not softened to him. I turned when I reached my door. "Why do you follow me?" said I, "is it not enough that I have lost everything? leave me in peace to-night."

He held out his hands to me, and caught mine. "Oh! Hester, Hester, weep, and weep with me!" he cried, "do not condemn me to this outer darkness—let me be with you in your grief."

I drew myself away from him. "No one can be with me in my grief, I am desolate," I said; but I waited for no answer. I closed my door, and he went away from the threshold—this threshold to which he had come for me, when I was a bride.

I went in and shut to my door. I shut the door of my heart, and closed myself up alone in this dreary solitary place. I was not without a consciousness even now that I had left them all longing, anxious, miserable about me; but I felt as though they were all enemies—all enemies! as if I had not a friend in this wretched forsaken world. I did not think what the real blow was, which had struck upon me. I only felt my dreary hopeless solitude, and the desire I had to be left here unmolested. I thought it would please me never to see a human face again. I was in a wilderness more desolate than any Eastern waste—there were no heaven above me, and no human fellowship around. God and the Lord were words to me. I believed

but I did not know them; I could not seek refuge *there*—and *here* there was not one—not one of those I had loved so well, but had betrayed me.

My little room, my bower, my girlish sanctuary which I had left in my bride's dress, and returned to now, worse than a widow! Quietly and mechanically I began to take off my dress; it was not grief but misery which filled my heart, and there is a great difference between them. My wretchedness stupified me—and when I laid down my head upon my pillow, I fell at once into a heavy deep sleep.

THE FOURTH DAY.

It was a clear, cold, sunshiny autumn morning; the atmosphere was full of sunshine, yet there was little warmth in the air, and there were thin misty clouds upon the sky, which looked like vapours which the earth had thrown off from her own still bosom, and the wind carried up unchanged. Yet out of doors it was a beautiful fresh day, and the sun beat in through our darkened windows with a full bright flush, in mockery of our sombre shade. A dreary dull excitement was in the house—it was the funeral day.

I had been living a strange, miserable,

solitary life. Every day Alice brought me some food, and I took it mechanically. Every day I went down stairs, and heard them speaking together. I listened when they addressed me, and answered them with perfect composure. I knew all the arrangements; by no pretext that I was not able, did I permit anything to be hid from me. I was quite able—my frame was strong—my heart was stunned—I could endure anything—there need have been no fears for me.

But my intercourse with them went no further. I heard what they had to say, and answered, but I suffered no approach towards friendship. Alice waited upon me with assiduous tenderness, but I never spoke to her. Mr. Osborne appealed to our long acquaintance—to my father's old, old friendship for him—to his love for mine and me. My heart was steeled. I made no response. I went and came among them alone—alone—as I was to be alone all my life.

And he—he was always there—always

ready to interpose for me if I expressed a wish, or opposed any intention of Mr. Osborne, who managed everything. If I was likely to be annoyed by any importunity, I knew that he interposed and freed me from it. I seemed to see everything he did, present or absent, by some strange magic. He did not persecute me with vain endeavours after a reconciliation—he left me to myself—we scarcely spoke to each other; yet when he was away I chafed and fretted at his absence, and when he returned I knew how he looked—what he did—as well as if I had flown to meet him, or hung upon him with a young wife's foolish fondness. We were evermore parted, yet evermore united—this feud and antagonism between us was as strong a bond as love.

My father was to be laid in the family grave—this was at a little solitary church half way between Cambridge and Cottiswoode. Some haughty Southcote in the old time had desired to be laid at the boundary

and extreme line of his own lands, and hence had arisen a little desolate church and graveyard, and the mausoleum of the race. They had arranged that Edgar Southcote was to be the chief mourner at this lonely funeral—*that* I could not bear. I could not see my father carried to his grave with only these two—Mr. Osborne and *him*, following upon the last journey. I said nothing, but I prepared myself—I wrapped a great black cloak about me, over my mourning dress—black, black, black—it was very meet. I veiled my head and my face, and went out from these doors like something that belonged to the midnight, and not to the day. Alice stood and gazed at me aghast while I robed myself; and when I turned to go out, she fell down at my feet, and clasped her arms round me, and cried and pleaded: "Do not go—it will kill you," she cried. I drew my dress out of her hands and bade her rise. "It will not kill me," I said bitterly, "yet if it did, it would be well."

As I went down stairs I met Mr. Osborne. He stood before me in amazement. He said, "Hester, you cannot think of this!"

"Let me go!" I said, "let some one who loved him go with him—let me pass—no one shall prevent me—he has none in the world of his own blood but me."

"My child, my child, you cannot bear it—all shall be done as you would approve," he said anxiously. I did not answer, but passed him with an impatient gesture. In the close, I found yet another interruption—but *he* did not try to prevent me—he followed me into the carriage—he knew me better than they did.

And so we set out upon our dreary journey—once more I looked from the carriage windows and wondered if this day was but a common day to the common people round. Once we me a marriage party—a gayer party than ours had been, five weeks ago, with young bright faces, and smiles and jests, and all the natural tokens of a time of joy. I looked at them with the

strangest interest. I wondered which was the bride and what was appointed to come to her. Should she be as miserable as I, or was mine a solitary instance? You would fancy a mourner had little room for such thoughts—but I had room for every kind of thought—no wild fancy or speculation, in that slow dreadful journey, came amiss to me.

Everything looked different from what it had been when I came by this same road to my father's death-bed; now the people were at work in the fields; there were voices in the air passengers on the road—everywhere life and motion, sunshine and hope. I saw the rustic people pause at their labours to look at our solemn procession; I could fancy how they asked each other who it was that came this way to his last rest. My thoughts went back to that night seven years ago, when my father and I drove this way together, leaving our ancestral home. We had never been on the road again so far as I knew—never till now—and now we were taking him to a home of which no man

should ever dispossess him, to rest with his forefathers for ever.

A very low rude wall, one of the fences of the country, was round the church-yard—the church itself was small and poor—a humble little chapel, where only a few scattered worshippers ever came. I do not know why it had been permitted to fall so much into neglect, for the family tomb was in a little chapel closely adjoining and opening from it. This shelter of our race was paved with old tombstones, every one bearing the name of a Southcote, and the walls were covered with tablets to the memory of the dead of our house. There were two raised tombs beside, with recumbent figures, memorials of some more distinguished or more ostentatious than the rest; and this house of the dead was lighted by a small Gothic window, filled with scraps of ancient glass; here, under the shelter of the groined roof, within these inscribed and monumental walls, and not where the free air of heaven should visit his grave, we were to lay

my father. It was well—better for him than the green grass, the flowers, the sunshine, and the outer human world, was the little family chapel where, withdrawn from the common dust, his race and kindred waited till the end.

In silence and solitude I stood at the head while it was being laid in its place. I did not weep, nor cry, nor faint. I never faltered for an instant from my firmness. In my cold, cold composure I stood and looked on. The words of the service never woke me, yet I heard every one of them. I noticed the very tone of the clergyman's voice, and the habitual cadence of the words—I knew it was because he said them so often that they rang to that measure. I observed everything—not the smallest incident escaped my eye. By and bye all was silent again—it was over, and we had to go away.

Only then did I linger for a moment—I looked round upon this well frequented place, where so many had been brought and had been

left before. I glanced over all the names, how full it was. This place was home—the house we were all born to inhabit—the permanent, lasting, dwelling-place. The new comer was not alone here; he was gathered to his fathers; he was entered upon his last and surest inheritance. I came away with a steady step—I think almost with a smile upon my face. My father had many friends around and beside him—only I was alone.

And then we set out to return to our life, and left the dead behind. Oh! life inexorable, cruel! how it sweeps upon the traces of the last slow journey, and beats out the mourner's footprints with its race and tumult! It was not hard to leave him, for he was well; but it was hard to note our quickened pace, to know that we were going back to every day. No one spoke—I was thankful for that—even Mr. Osborne did not break upon the silence. Once more the people in the fields looked up to see us going back again, and the light came from the west, and the labours were almost

over, and we had left our new inhabitant in the grave; that was all the world knew of us as we went home.

When we entered, I saw that the table was spread, and it occurred to me, that at my father's table he ought to be represented, not by Edgar Southcote, nor by Mr. Osborne; and when I had taken off my mantle, I returned and took my place. I saw Mr. Osborne look at me with extreme and uncomprehending wonder. He could not understand my motive, nor what he called, the rule of my conduct; he did everything very properly himself, and conformed to all the usual decorums, and he did not know how to judge me. I was aware of his wondering, and almost disapproving glance. I was aware that I ought not to have been able, on this day, to take my place here as I did; but I was not moved by knowing it; I only felt an indignant determination that neither of these two should rule at my father's board—this was his house still, and I was his heir.

When the meal was over, I returned to my room; but I could no longer rest there; there was a visible void in the house—a dull ache and vacancy in my heart. I wandered about from room to room, to his bed-chamber where he died, and where he had been lying like a king in state and rest; from thence I went to the library where his chair stood by the table, where his desk and his books seemed almost to have been used to-day.

There I sat down in my dull vacant misery: the door was closed, the house was still—save for the branches waving in the evening wind across the window, there was neither sound nor motion near. I was quite alone—I sat looking at the diamond ring upon my finger, his last gift. I wondered what he meant by saying it was a misfortune. A misfortune!—I had no need, yet no fear of such, in my withered life. One great calamity, as I thought, had put me beyond the reach of fate. "No, no!" I repeated to myself unconsciously aloud, "fate has done its worst—I can suffer no more. I can

lose no more—there is no misfortune left possible to me."

As I spoke I heard some motion in the room, and starting saw Mr. Osborne rise from behind the curtain where he had been reading. In proportion to my former confidence in him, was my resentment against him now—and I became very angry when I perceived he had been watching me.

"Then you have made up your mind to be miserable," he said somewhat sharply, as he came up to me. "This is very foolish, Hester! it is worse than foolish—it is criminal, and it is weak; you forget your natural grief to nurse your wrath, and confirm yourself in a sense of injury. Where is your poor mother's miniature which I gave you for a charm to keep those evil thoughts away? It might have soothed your father's last hour, if you had not thus embittered your heart. Child, child! it is easier to make misery than to heal it—do not throw your life away."

"I have no life to throw away," said I sul-

lenly, "it has been taken from me and all its hopes. I do not care if I should die to-morrow."

"Do you think that those who make such speeches are in the best mind for dying?" said Mr. Osborne. "Dying is a solemn matter, Hester, and can only be done once. But at present, living is more in your way. Do you know that this revengeful passion of yours will estrange all sympathy from you? Men and women who have lived long in the world have generally known some *real* calamities, Hester! it is only boys and girls who can afford to indulge in despair, and say fate has done its worst. You do not know what you say—instead of fate and its curse, providence has blessed you more greatly than you are able to perceive."

"Not providence—providence never works by falsehood," cried I.

Mr. Osborne's face flushed with displeasure. "You are very bitter, Hester, very harsh in your judgment," he said, "and I would not bear with this passion of yours so long if you

had not been a dear child to me for many a year; for your father's and your mother's sake I overlook your resentment against myself, though I have not deserved it; but, Hester, beware—it is all very well now to be heroically miserable; but you are young—you have a long life before you; and, however, long you may dwell upon your injury, some time or other you will begin to want and long for, the happiness which now you despise. Hester! come, I will confess you have had a hard initiation into the cares of life: be a woman and a brave one—let us see no more of the girl's whims and humours. I can promise you all tenderness for your honest sorrow, but none for your wilful wretchedness."

"I ask no tenderness, no sympathy. I will not accept it," I cried starting from my seat. "You know I have not a true friend in the world—who should sympathize with *me?* every one of you has deceived me!"

"If that is your conclusion, so be it," said Mr. Osborne, walking back to his seat, "I can

only hope that your true friends will not be lost, before you have real need for them; and that when you come back to look for it, Hester, and find your right senses, your happiness will not be entirely out of your reach."

I did not wait to hear any more, but left the room, unable to speak with anger and indignation—the stupor of my misery was broken, I was roused almost to madness. It was not yet a week since I had fallen from my happy confidence into this dark abyss of falsehood and betrayal, and already they blamed *me*—already they called me resentful, revengeful, obdurate. I, the victim of their successful plots, I who stood alone and no one with me! I saw at once how I would be judged on all sides, how every one would condemn me—how light *his* offence would be in the eyes of the world—how unpardonable mine! If I had been like to yield before, I could not have yielded after that. I set myself fairly to meet it all. He should have justice, justice! and neither deceit nor pity from me.

In this tumult, my heart awoke. Its dead and sullen inaction gave way to a vivid feeling of reality—and as if I had known it now for the first time, there burst upon me the full truth of my father's death. Yes! for the first time I felt to my heart, how desolate I was, and with a bitter satisfaction remembered that I had nothing to wean me from my grief, nothing to distract the mourning of my orphanhood—no wooing tender happiness to lead me away from the grave where I would build all my thoughts. Yet now also, for the first time I remembered what he had said upon his death bed—strange words for him; "one event should not poison a life." I thought I heard this echoing round me in my father's failing voice—the voice I should hear no more; and I threw myself down before the bed, kneeling and covering my face in passionate and bitter weeping. My father! my father! where was he? where?

When I rose from my knees, it was quite dark. I do not think any one can be in great

or real grief without trying to pray. I prayed little in the stupor of my misery, but now broken wandering disconnected petitions came to my lips among my tears. When I appealed to God, though ever so feebly—and, alas! so little as I knew of Him! it calmed me in some degree. I rose and bathed my face to put away the tears—I was subdued and melted—my eyes filled in spite of myself. I did not weep over the death-bed or the grave. I felt now as if I could weep continuously, and that it was impossible to stay my tears.

Then I heard a timid step without—I knew it was Alice—and by and bye she came softly knocking to the door; under the door crept in the light from her candle. I remembered with a bitter pang the last time she came to me thus in the darkness—the night of my betrothal. When I thought of that, I rose firmly and admitted her. How I was changed! Alice came in with a hesitating step, looking wistfully at me to see how far she might venture. Alice was greatly shaken with the events of these

last few days. The bright look on her face was overclouded, she was humble and deprecating and uneasy. I had been her child, loving, confiding, almost depending upon her—and there was such a dreary difference in everything now.

She set the light upon the table, and lingered, looking at me. I fancy she saw some encouragement in the gleam of my wet eyes and the softening of my face. She came behind me under pretence of doing something, and then she said timidly, "Miss Hester, may I speak?"

I could not say no. I did not answer at all —and she took this for permission.

"You think every one's deceived you, dear," said Alice humbly, "and in your great trouble you stand by yourself, and will let nobody help you. I don't deny, Miss Hester, every one's done wrong; but, darling, it was all for love of you."

"Do not say so, Alice," I exclaimed, eagerly, "you insult me when you speak thus."

"Oh! Miss Hester, think upon my meaning," cried Alice, "I thought I knew his look, his step, his voice from the first time he came under this roof. I pondered and pondered in my mind if it could be him; but he never told me that I should know. You were as like to know as I was, dear—you had seen him all the same; and it was not my part to speak, or I thought it was not Miss Hester. Then the night he spoke to you first, he brought the roses here; he said to me, 'Do you think she would like them, Alice?' and in my heart I knew where they came from; but never a word was spoken of that by either him or me. On your wedding day I got more again, by a servant's hand. I never doubted they came from Cottiswoode, nor that he sent them; but, dear, he never told me, and I had no right to know. You were willing to marry him, Miss Hester, you were bound up in one another; was I to presume that I knew more than you did, darling! And what was it I knew? nothing at all, dear, but the thought in my heart. Oh! Miss

Hester, you're all I have in the world—don't turn away from Alice—don't think I've deceived you—I'm desolate without you."

"*I* am quite desolate; I have no one in the world to trust to," said I.

"Oh! don't say it—don't say it!" cried Alice, "he's been led into a snare once, Miss Hester, but truth is in his heart."

"It is I who have been led into a snare," said I, bitterly, "he has wrecked all my expectations—he has plunged me out of happiness into misery; but that is not all; he has placed me so that I must either yield and be satisfied like a weak fool, or if I resist, be known as a passionate ill-tempered woman, who makes him miserable. I see all that is before me—I am doomed like my father. My own life is robbed of every comfort, and the blame of making him unhappy will be added to me—oh, I see it all! I shall be called a termagant, a household plague, a scorn to women. It is not enough that my life is wretched—my good name must go from me too!"

"Oh! Miss Hester, not by his will," cried Alice.

As she spoke, a change came upon me. The pride of a wife came to my mind. I could blame him myself—but I could hear no one else blame him—I could not admit a third person to our domestic discord. My quarrel with Alice was for her own fault, and not for his. My bitterness against Mr. Osborne was because *he* had deceived me, and not because Edgar Southcote had. No one but himself had any right to speak of his error to me.

"I am not speaking of my husband," I said coldly, "what is between us can only be settled by ourselves; no one can interfere between him and me. I speak only of circumstances—of my unfortunate and unhappy position; that is all I refer to."

Alice paused, chilled and overcast once more; it was difficult for her, a humble, simple woman, who rarely was offended, and who, when she was, forgave like a Christian, and never suffered the sun to go down upon her wrath, to under-

stand or to deal with me; she stole round behind my chair, and bent down on the ground by my feet.

"Miss Hester, will you forgive *me?* you are used to me—you would not take to another for a long time, dear. I was your nurse, and I have been your maid, Miss Hester, all your life—don't cast off Alice. May be, I don't deserve that you ever should trust me more; but let me be beside you, darling; let me serve you, and wait on you, and comfort you if I can. Oh! Miss Hester, my dear sweet young lady trusted in me—and even your papa trusted in me—don't cast me off, for you are my own child!"

I cried long and bitterly. I could not help it. The pleading of Alice recalled again to me how desolate and solitary I was. I had not a friend in the world, old or young, to whom I could confide my trouble; not one whom I could lean upon if I was ill or suffering; alas, not a woman in existence, except herself, whom I should have wept never to see again! and disappointed as I was in those hopes of perfect

sympathy and union with my husband, which every one forms at some time or other, my heart yearned for the natural solace—the comfort of mother or of sister, which providence had denied to me. I let my hand fall upon her shoulder—I leaned upon her. "Oh, Alice, Alice, why did you deceive me?" I cried with a great burst of tears.

She did not answer anything—she drew me close to her bosom, and caressed and soothed me. My heart beat calmer. I was subdued—I scarcely knew how, as I leant upon Alice. I seemed to have found some rest and comfort for which I had been seeking vainly. When she began to weep over me, my own tears stayed—my heart was eased because I had forgiven her; and then I raised myself up, and we sat together speaking of my father. I had never heard about his last days.

"He never was well after you went away, Miss Hester," said Alice; "all that day after Mr. Osborne left, he wandered up and down talking to himself. The most that he said,

that I could hear, was 'she will be well—she will be well;' for dear, his heart was wrapped up in you, though he said little; and then sometimes he would take a turn, as if he was doubtful, and once I heard him say, like trying to persuade himself, 'She is not like me—she will not resent it as I would have done.' I was not spying on him to hear this, Miss Hester; but he wandered about so, wherever I was, or whatever we were doing, and never seemed to notice us, and Mary, if she had minded, might have heard as well as me. A week before you came home he took his bed, and when I was staying in his room waiting on him, he sometimes spoke to me. God was good to him dear, and gave him time to think, and he was not near so high, as he drew near his latter end; but, Miss Hester, you might not care to hear what your papa said to me."

"Oh! tell me everything—every word, Alice!" I cried.

"Sometimes he would not say a word for hours—and then all at once would speak as if

he thought I had been following all that was in his mind," said Alice; " in this way, all at once, he said to me, ' When she comes home, you will stay by her, Alice—let nothing persuade you to go away from her—she has no mother, no friend—and he did not say another word that night; then it was again, ' She may have disappointment in her life—few are free of it—the simplest comfort is the best. Alice, you are a simple woman, you live in every day—do you bring your fresh heart to comfort my child.' It looks presuming, Miss Hester, I know it does, dear—I never could have thought such things of myself—but that was what he said."

" Go on—go on, Alice," said I, as well as I was able through my tears.

" Dear, there was not a great deal more; sometimes he said only your name, and ' my only child—my only child!' and then he would turn and say, ' Be sure you never leave her, Alice, she will have need of you.' I cannot think on much more; but when I went and told him you were come—it was in the night we

got the news, and I was sitting up with him—he said I was to send away that moment to call you to him; and you came—and oh, darling! what a comfort all your life, that you were in time to see his latter end!"

I was weeping now without restraint, leaning upon Alice. My solitude was less desolate, less miserable, when she was beside me; and I, who had always prized so much my father's few tokens of tenderness—it went to my heart to hear how he had remembered me when I was away. "Do you think he knew, Alice?" I whispered; it was an unnecessary question—for I was sure he did.

"He never said a word, dear—but it was not like he would tell me," said Alice. "Yes, Miss Hester, he had found it out—I knew it by his eye that very day."

And now that I had the clue, so did I; but I no longer felt anger against my father—though all of them had suffered me to sink passively into this gulf and grave of all my hopes.

When I went to rest that night, it was Alice's kind hand that smoothed away my hair, and said good-night, at my pillow. I wept myself to sleep, but my sleep was not haunted by the miserable visions of those nights which were past.

THE FIFTH DAY.

OCTOBER was over now, and sullen and dark winter weather oppressed the skies, and settled down upon the country. I was still in Cambridge, living alone in my father's house. My husband came and went constantly, yet left me unmolested; I almost think he was afraid at once to enter upon the question of my return, and he respected the grief which would not be sympathized with. I believe, indeed, that to have an excuse for delaying any explanation or arrangements between us—to put off fixing that future which we both dreaded—there was a mutual pretence of business which

claimed my attention after my father's death; but there was, indeed, no such thing. He had left one or two legacies, and desired that, except the books he bequeathed to Mr. Osborne, his library should be left intact, and even the house preserved, and a housekeeper placed in it when I returned to my own home; but he had neither debts nor debtors — there were no arrangements to make. I lived a dreary life in the drawing-room, where I was sick at heart to go near the window, and never left my chair when I could help it. I read earnestly, yet eagerly, whatever books came to my hand — novels when I could get them— I was glad of anything to cheat me from my own brooding unhappy thoughts; yet I never thought of going away. Where could I go to? all the world was alike solitary—alike desolate to me. The heavy listlessness of grief came upon me—I cared for nothing—I scarcely desired anything. I had never had any visitors, and though one or two came to see me now because I was mistress of Cottiswoode, to offer their condolences and sympathy for my loss,

I denied them admittance when I could, and when I could not, suffered their coming and their going so indifferently that they seldom came to trouble me again. Mr. Osborne came now and then, but his visits were only duty, and there was little pleasure in them for either him or me. By degrees I was left entirely alone with Alice, and with my husband, when he came. People had begun already to speak of me with astonishment. I made Alice confess this was the case; and no one knew me or could take my part; but in my heart I was rather glad than otherwise, to have my first condemnation over so soon.

It was now a month since we had returned home, and save on the first evening and morning after our arrival at Cottiswoode, we had spoken to each other only on indifferent subjects. I knew this could not last. I had always in my mind a certain deadened and dull expectation of our next interview. I feared it, and would have put it off from day to day, yet it seemed the one thread of life in my languid existence. My

heart beat when I heard his footsteps come along the close; that springy light rapid step! —I knew its faintest echo—and equally well I knew it when duller and fainter it went away. The misery of our position was, that we were not, and could not be indifferent to each other; when he came, this subdued restrained expectation animated me into temporary vigour; when he went away, I was aware of an aching disappointment, which mingled with a sense of relief. Involuntarily I watched and waited for him—if our meetings had all been joy, they scarcely could have been so breathlessly anticipated, for then we should have known each other's plans, and intentions, and wishes, and now we were each in perfect ignorance of what the other meant to do.

I myself was still worse than that—I did not know my own intentions; I had no plan for the future. I knew we must by and bye decide upon something; but my mind seemed incapable of any action, save brooding over my own thoughts, or speculating on his. Alice

had brightened, I could not tell why, since our interview. I suspected she nourished vain hopes that I was weak, and would yield to him; none of them understood me, or if any one did, it was he.

Things were in this position to-day, when Alice came and told me that he had arrived, and wanted to see me. I told her to show Mr. Southcote up-stairs. I was able to compose myself before he entered the room. I am sure he could see no sign of agitation. It was very different with him; his face had an excited, unsteady look, he was very pale, yet sometimes his cheek flushed with a deep faint colour. I could not see that he either had any plan. I read in his whole manner that he had come to try once more what entreaty, and persuasion, and penitence would do. This hardened and strengthened me; I was ready to hear him with coolness and self-possession when I saw that *he* brought neither to his conference with me.

He sat down near to me, and leaned forward

across my little table. His voice was dry and hoarse with emotion. "Hester," he said, "I have waited, and been patient. I have not hastened nor troubled you. Have you no comfort, no hope, no forgiveness for me now?"

"It is I that should have comfort—for it is only I that have been in sorrow," I said.

"Yes, and you have put me away from you. I have not been permitted to say that I grieved with my wife," he said; "yet I have grieved with you Hester. You can shut out the *man* who has offended you—but you cannot shut out the heart; all these weary nights and days —all this wretched time, I have been with you, Hester. You cannot exclude my thoughts or my love—you cannot make me forget that you are mine."

"I cannot make myself forget it," I said. "No, you do well to taunt me. I know that I belong to you. It has all come true—I feel what is upon me like a chain of iron. I remember your cruel words, when you said 'for

ever and ever'—I remember what my father told us—you do not need to repeat my misery to me; I acknowledge it."

I saw him start and draw back when I said "my misery," as if it were a blow; but he recovered himself. "For ever and for ever!" he repeated, "do you remember that night Hester? there was no misery in our way that night—and how is it that we are changed? I have sinned against you, and you have punished me. For a whole month now—and it is only two months since our marriage day—the meanest passenger in the streets has had as much kindness at your hands as I—is this not enough Hester? can you not forget now this dark episode, and return to what we were. Let me suppose it is again that night—let us return to the time of our betrothal, and begin anew. Will you speak to me, Hester?"

"We cannot return to the time of our betrothal," said I; "*then* I was deceived, now I know—and it is impossible to restore the delusion again."

"Was there nothing but delusion?" he said hastily, "was it folly to suppose that you cared for me at all—or is vengeance and not pity the companion of love?"

"I cannot tell," said I. "I am no poet; but if you think it is easier to be wounded to the heart—to be deceived and ruined, and put to shame—by one who is dear to you than by an enemy, I know you are mistaken. If I had not cared for you, I should have had only myself to mourn for, and that would have been a light burden."

He sank back in his chair for a moment with a look of blank dismay and almost horror. "Deceived and ruined and put to shame!" he repeated. "Hester! what meaning do you put upon these words?"

I felt the blood rush to my face, with indignation and shame and nervous excitement. "It is quite true," I said, "you have taken the hope and strength out of my life—is not that ruin? and you have disgraced me in my own eyes. I did not leave my father's house with

you—you know I did not give either heart or hand to you; but I awake and find that I am your wife—you have disgraced and shamed me to myself. I can only feel contempt and scorn for the deceived and foolish girl whom you have shown to me in her true weakness. I can never hold up my head any more—and by and bye you will disgrace me to the world."

"How shall I do that, Hester?" he asked; his voice rang sharp and harsh—he felt what I said deeply—and in addition, I saw that at last I had roused a kindred opposition and anger in his mind.

I found a certain pleasure in it. I was glad to rouse him to be like me, in bitterness and enmity; though I was much excited, I had command of myself—I could speak slowly and clearly as I thought. I had never been given to many words—but I appreciated the possession of them now.

"When your neighbours see the disappointed sullen woman who is called by your name, they will know what to think of her," I said, "I

shall be pointed at as one whose evil temper, whose bitter disposition, makes every one round me miserable. All the hard tales of the old Southcotes will be revived in me—they will say I am a curse instead of a blessing—they will make an example of me, and tell how happy I might be—how miserable I am. No one will know of the secret poison that has come into my life; but they will know that I am bitter and harsh and unlovely, and they will judge what they see; the very servants, poor Amy who could not leave me till she had told me who she was—they will think me an evil spirit—they will shrink out of my way—and all the world will give their sympathy to you."

While I spoke thus, though it moved him much—though he changed colour, and sometimes for a moment his eye flashed upon me with indignation, I saw at once that I had relieved him in some point. When I thought of it, I perceived that all this speech of mine pointed to no separation; but almost told him that I was ready to follow him home. I had

not intended this—indeed I did not know what I had intended—I had formed no plan, and I only spoke, as I so often acted, on the moment's impulse, without pausing to think what it might lead to. When I discovered his satisfaction, it startled me for a moment; but then I was occupied listening to what he said. He spoke in a softened and hopeful tone.

"This will not last, Hester! your own good heart will interpose for me. I have deceived you once, it is true; but neither I nor any one else will do you injustice."

I made no answer. I saw he had something more to say, and I waited sullenly to know what it was.

"Will you come home?" he asked, "there is nothing here but memories of sadness. Come Hester! life and its duties wait upon us while we dally. If you cannot forgive me, still, come with me, Hester. If we do our duty, the blessing will come to us. At present we are paralyzed—neither you nor I are good for anything—and our life was not made for our own caprice—come!"

"And what should I be good for?" I asked with some astonishment; for hitherto my life had been one of the most complete and total uselessness, and I did not understand what was required from me. When he took this tone, I always acknowledged his influence—it was only when we came to personal matters—when I sat triumphant on the eminence of injury—that I got the better of him.

"What? everything!" he said, "I know what you are, Hester! you have life before you as I have; and happy or not happy, we have all its duties to do—not one thing, but a multitude. Come among your own people, to your own home—you have authority to exercise, charities and kindnesses to spread around you. You are no less yourself, because, if you will, you are disappointed and deceived in me; I will bear my burden as it is just I should; but Hester, it becomes you to be no less brave—you must take up yours."

I gazed upon him with amazement—involuntarily my heart responded to this call he made

upon me. No one had ever bidden me arise and work before; but when I heard his voice, I suddenly acknowledged that this was the want of my life. I was quite in the mood for it—I might have gone into a nunnery, or joined a sisterhood of mercy, had I been a Catholic, or in a country where such things were. I immediately leaped upon a wild imaginative vision of those things which he described so soberly, as the duties of life. I took the heroic view of them at once—I had no eye for patience and meekness, and such tame virtues; my rapid glance sought out the great self-sacrifices, the privations of voluntary humility. I was ready to walk over the burning ploughshares—to be a martyr at once.

Yes! I began to be ashamed of my expectation, that he would plead, and pray, and humble himself at my feet, and that I, injured and deceived, would spurn him from me. I was ashamed of resenting so bitterly my own unhappiness. In a moment I had reached the opposite extreme. What was happiness? a

mere bubble on the surface. Duty and Labour were the zest of life.

With the speed of lightning these thoughts passed through my mind—and all the time he sat gazing at me across the table. I think he scarcely was prepared for my answer; for he met the first words with a startled look of mingled embarrassment and joy.

"When do you wish me to go home?" I said. "I am ready now."

"Ready now—to go home?" he exclaimed, with a flush of surprise and delight, rising to come to me; but he caught my abstracted, pre-occupied eye, and, with a deeper blush of mortification, sat down again. "You cannot come too soon, Hester," he continued, in a subdued, and disappointed tone, "for everything is disorganized and out of order—there is the greatest want of you—though I will not say how I myself long to see you in your proper place—will you come to-morrow?"

"There are some things to do," I said, vacantly, delaying without any purpose in the delay. "Will Monday do?"

"Yes, yes!" he said with eagerness, "I shall come for you then; and now, I go away in hope."

I made no answer—my mind was busied with my own projects—already in my thoughts I had begun my life of heroism and martyrdom at Cottiswoode. Already I washed the feet of the poor, and watched by the bed of the plague-stricken. I did not pause to consider possibilities, nor ordinary rules; but followed up my own wild idea, in my own eager fashion. He waited for something further from me; but I said nothing to him—and after a little interval he went away.

It was now Friday, and I had pledged myself to be ready on Monday to go to Cottiswoode. I went immediately to find Alice; I could perceive that she had been awaiting with great anxiety the issue of our interview, though absorbed as I was in my new thoughts, it did not immediately occur to me why—and when I went to her, Alice was quite nervous with expectation.

"Do you think some one could be got quickly to keep the house, Alice?" said I, "do you think you could find some one to-day, or to-morrow?"

Her face lighted up suddenly.

"To be sure I could, Miss Hester," said Alice; "but, dear, why?"

"Because I have arranged to go home on Monday," said I, "to go home, Alice, to the duties of my life."

"Bless you, darling!" she cried; but her colour changed when she saw my unresponsive face. "It's not against your will, dear," she said timidly, "you're not forced to go, Miss Hester?"

"*Forced?* no! unless by my duty, which is there," said I. "I begin to see what is the use of me, Alice—or what should be, rather—for I have never been of use to anyone. I must go to begin my work—there is the proper field for me—and now when I know what it is, unhappiness shall never prevent me from doing my duty."

"Is that all, Miss Hester?" said Alice, with a wistful look—she was more disappointed than even *he* had been.

"Yes! that is all," said I, "what more should any one seek for? I wonder you never told me, Alice, how useless I was."

"Has any one told you now?" said Alice, drawing herself up with a little flush of simple anger, "or, dear, what has put such a thought in your mind, to-day?"

"Not any one telling me," I answered; "but I see it very well, and clearly; perhaps, indeed, after all, I could not have done very much when I was a girl—it is different now; but, Alice, let us see what preparations we have to make, for there is very little time."

"Yes, Miss Hester, directly," said Alice, taking up her bonnet, "I'll go and see after the old woman; don't you be waiting about the library, dear, it's a dreary place for you. Wouldn't you come out now your own self, Miss Hester, and breathe the air? Cambridge streets are no great things, I dare say, to

them that's been in foreign countries and in London, but better than always moping in the house—come darling—come yourself and see."

I was persuaded, and went with her. The day was not so miserable out of doors as it looked within, and it was still scarcely past midday, and there were many people abroad. We had not gone far, before we met Mr. Osborne, who had a clergyman with him—a tall, meagre, middle-aged man, in very precise clerical dress, about whom there was a certain look of asceticism and extreme devotion, which as it happened chimed in with my mood of the moment. Mr. Osborne and I met very drily after our late quarrel. I had not softened in my resentment towards him, and he was impatient and angry with me—so that I thought it was mere aggravation, and a desire to exasperate me which tempted him to introduce his companion to "Mrs. Southcote of Cottiswoode;" it was the first time I had heard my name stated so, and I could not subdue the

start and tremor with which I heard it—so that I did not, at the instant, notice the name of the person introduced to me, and it was only when I heard it repeated, that it struck upon me with a sound more startling than my own.

"Mr. Savile is rector of Cottisbourne—the clergyman of your parish, Hester," said Mr. Osborne—"when do you return home?"

"On Monday," I said; but my whole attention was fixed upon my new acquaintance—Savile!—I could not think, for the first moment, what association I had with the name—but it was a painful one, and it had something to do with Edgar Southcote.

"I am glad to meet my young relative," said the clergyman with a stiff bow—his young relative! could he mean *me?*

I gazed at him for a moment, but only with a dull astonishment—for it was quite beyond my comprehension what he could mean.

"The parish has been much neglected. I hope to bring its necessities before you soon," said Mr. Savile in his measured chanting tone, "I do not despair of making the desert

rejoice, with your assistance, Mrs. Southcote; but at present it is in a deplorable condition. No church sentiments, no feeling for what is seemly and in order—there has been no resident on the estates for so many years."

"Ah! the young people will rectify that no doubt," said Mr. Osborne, carelessly; "I am glad to see you out of doors, Hester, and glad to hear you are going home; your own good sense—I always trusted in that."

"I shall be glad to do all I can," I said, hurriedly answering the clergyman, and taking no notice of Mr. Osborne, "but you will have to instruct me at first, for I am quite ignorant of work; can I take anything with me that would be of service? pray let me know."

"I shall be glad to make out a list of books and useful articles—no trouble! pray do not speak of it," said the Rev. Mr. Savile, with a wonderful bow.

Mr. Osborne groaned "I am in some haste," he said sharply, "good morning, Hester—I shall see you before you leave Cambridge;" and as he turned away, I heard him mutter—

"Poor foolish child!—is she to comfort herself after this fashion?"

I turned away proudly—this worldly man might scorn these self-denying labours, which were to be all the pleasure of my life—but I only clasped them closer on that account. I called Alice to me again, and went on in silence. I persuaded myself how glad I was that I had encountered this clergyman, but in spite of my devotion to the work about which he seemed so anxious, I could not keep my mind from straying back to his name, and what he had said. Savile—Savile—it suddenly burst upon me! that was the name of the man who came with the boy Edgar to Cottiswoode, before we left it. I felt my face burn with indignation and displeasure—he called me his young relative—perhaps he was *that* man's son, and a relation of Edgar Southcote. I thought it a new insult, that by any chance such a person as the first Savile should be related to me. Yet so much was I moved by my new sentiments that I think I made the strongest

effort which I ever recollect making to put down this feeling. Yes, I had become enamoured of mortification and self-abasement—I had my work to begin to—and what did it matter if this clergyman *were* Savile's son—what did anything matter to me? Was I not about to court humiliation and offer sacrifices—to forget my worldly comforts and delicate breeding—to wash the feet of pilgrims? and I was glad to find at the very outset a great unexpected mortification in my way. I walked along very rapidly beside Alice. She was anxious to speak to me—very anxious about myself—but I did not think of beginning my labours by doing what I could to lighten the kind heart of Alice.

When we were returning, after visiting a woman whom Alice knew, and whom she arranged with—for though this might have been a very suitable beginning of my labours, I did not think of making it so, but was shy and stood aloof—we began at last to speak. Alice no longer understood or could deal with me; she

hesitated and was timid, and never knew what to say in our conversations. I do not wonder at it—for when I look back upon those days, I do not always find it easy to comprehend myself.

We had just passed a group of young ladies—three handsome tall well-dressed girls, evidently sisters, and full of talk and eager interest in something they were discussing. "Dear," said Alice, with a sigh, "if you had but a sister, Miss Hester, or some good young lady to be company for you at Cottiswoode."

"I want no company, Alice," said I.

"You never knew what it was, dear," said Alice, "a friend is a great blessing and comfort, more than you think for. Couldn't you now, Miss Hester, darling think upon some one to keep you company this dull winter? You'll be lone in the country, and nothing to amuse you—do think upon it, dear."

"I do not want to be amused. I am going to work like a rational creature," said I; "do you think I am good for nothing but amusing myself, Alice? No, I have lived long enough for my own pleasure—and now that pleasure is out of the question, I want to live for others. I must have been very selfish all my life. I want to sacrifice myself now, and live for the good of the poor and the distressed."

"Dear, it's a blessed thing to hear a young lady like you speak such words," said Alice, with tears in her eyes, "and to serve God and to be good to his poor, is the way to be happy, darling; but you never need to live solitary, or give up a good friend for that."

"You do not understand me, Alice. I don't want to be happy," said I, sternly; "I want to do my duty—happiness is all over in this world for me. Do not say any-

thing—you will only vex me; and you know I have no good friend to give up, even if I cared for it."

Alice paused again, disconcerted, eager, ready to say a great deal, but afraid of offending me. I fancy, at last, that she thought it best to let me have my own way.

"And what will you do, Miss Hester?" said Alice.

"I scarcely know," said I, "the clergyman will tell me, and I shall learn, and I am sure, *you* know, Alice, what ladies can do in the country. I could go to nurse the sick in the village—that is one thing."

"But, dear Miss Hester," said Alice, "if the Queen had come to nurse your papa—do you think she could have made up to him, poor gentleman, for the want of you?"

"No, no, no! why do you say such things?" said I.

"Because poor folks feel just the same," said Alice, with a little dignity; "a poor

man would sooner have his own wife, and a poor woman her mother, or her child, to nurse her, than the greatest lady in the land."

I was slightly offended at what Alice said. "I shall only go where I am of use, you may be sure," I said, "I will seek out the poor, and work for them. I will teach the children. I will take care of the old people. There is a great deal of misery everywhere—I can understand it now—and I shall find plenty to do."

"Yes, dear, there's plenty of trouble," said Alice, with a heavy sigh: "plenty of God's sending, and plenty of our own making, Miss Hester; and old folks like me, that have seen grief, it goes to our heart to see the young and the great that have happiness at their feet, and will not stoop down to lift it—and that's the truth."

"If you speak of me—I do not wish to hear of happiness. I have no longer anything to do with it," said I angrily.

How I clung to this! how I closed myself up in a gloomy panoply, and defied their vain consolations. We went the rest of the way home in silence. I was displeased with Alice, and she was grieved for me. I do not know how *she* comforted herself; but I took refuge in my intended martyrdom. I did not wish it to be agreeable. I was impatient of being told that I could do all this, yet not diminish either my comforts or enjoyments. I was anxious to suffer, to scorn delights, to meet with trials—not the Lady Bountiful of a village, but the heroine of some dangerous mission was it my desire to be. I had the true ascetic mood upon me. I was not disposed to "endure hardness" for the sake of doing good; but rather to endure doing good for the sake

of the sacrifice and suffering which I anticipated so eagerly; and this was how I intended to act upon my husband's sober exhortation to come to my own home and my own people—to take up my burden, and do the duties of my life.

THE SIXTH DAY.

MONDAY dawned bright and genial; one of those rare November days, when summer seems to come back again to see how the world looks under the reign of winter. The air was not cold, but so clear, that on these wide plains of ours you could see for miles around you. There was no wind; white clouds lay entranced upon the blue deep sky, which was mellowed and warmed with a flood of sunshine—and against it the few trees stood out with a distinctness which

became almost ridiculous, when it was a bristling pollard willow which outlined all its bare twigs, like the hair of a frightened rustic standing on end, upon that wonderful background. The sandy path sparkled with minute crystals, the mosses on the low stone fences caught the eye like banks of flowers: here and there a little rivulet of water, bridged with a plank, came sparkling through a meadow with a line of trees on either side; and under this full sunshine, an occasional morsel of new ploughed field gave diversity to the vast level—and long lonely roads, with a single horseman or foot-passenger coming clear out of the sky, broke through the sunburnt meadows, hedgeless and naked, thrusting up now and then another leafless affrighted willow —a far-seeing sentinel, scared by something coming which it could see, though you could not. The sky itself falling out of

its glorious full blue, into wonderful grays and olive tones, deepening and deepening, yet everywhere breaking into streaks of light, to the very edge of the horizon, gave a wonderful charm to everything below; and upon our faces came the fresh air, which was not wind, without violence yet full of exhilaration, so fresh, so pure, so limitless, a world of sweet existence in itself. Though I closed my heart against its influence, I could not help but note the day—I could not help comparing it to that bright face of Alice opposite me, from which youth had past, which had little hope for this world, and on which sorrow had fallen with its utmost weight, yet which was happy still. When I looked at my husband—there was the light and the hope of manhood upon his face, yet it was clouded; and what was I?—a sullen spring-day, ungenial, ungladdened. So I carried out my involuntary metaphor.

Everything had been suitably arranged in Cambridge—a housekeeper was established in the house, and Mary remained with her—nothing was disturbed of all our old household arrangements. My father had left his income to me, of course; and I was able to maintain this for myself. It was equally a thing of course that Alice should accompany me—we never needed to speak on the subject, it was so clearly understood between us—and my husband and Alice and I, travelled very silently to Cottiswoode. I had sent there the previous night, a large box full of things which Mr. Savile, in a very stiff polite note had recommended me to bring. Among its contents were some prayer-books and catechisms, but I am afraid one of the most bulky items was dark cloth for a sort of uniform which Mr. Savile recommended to be worn by the lady visitors in his parish—for he had hopes, he said, of establishing a devout

and energetic sisterhood to assist him in his work. I was much occupied with my own intentions and purposes in this respect. I saw myself in the gloomy mantle of the order going about sternly, sadly, serving other people only to mortify and humiliate myself. I did not pause to ask whether, with my clouded face and obdurate, dull, determined heart, I would be an acceptable visitor anywhere. "The poor" were merely the passive objects of my self-martyrdom. I never took them into account in the matter, nor paused to consider whether or not *my* ministrations would be a comfort to any one. My whole wild plan sprang entirely from thoughts of myself.

When we came to the great avenue of elms, I gazed up at it steadily. They were grand old trees. The free wide air about them had strengthened the noble life in these stout retainers of our house.

They threw abroad their great branches with a glorious freedom—they had no bias nor stoop in one direction or another, but stood boldly upright, impartial, indifferent from what point of the compass the wind might blow — and behind the forest of boughs and twigs, at every countless crevice and opening, the sky looked through, marking the intertwining lines, great and small, like some grand lacework, upon the white rounded clouds poised upon its surface, and upon its own magnificent full blue. I saw how excited and nervous Alice became as we neared home—she gazed about her with eager glances—she folded her hands together, wrung them close, put them to her eyes. It was hard for her to keep still, harder still to be silent as glimpse after glimpse of the familiar road burst upon us. My husband spoke to her once or twice in sympathy. I said nothing. When we passed

the village, I saw the clergyman standing in the garden at the Rectory, looking at us as we passed by, and there were many little groups in the neighbourhood of Cottisbourne, and the children set up a shrill hurrah as we drove through the village; but I sat back in my corner, and cared for nothing. At last we drew up and alighted. This time I suffered his hand to help me, though the memory of that former night returned upon me, so that I scarcely could keep my composure. Once more I looked up at the arms of our house sculptured above the door — once more I saw the servants ranged within—and then I suffered him to lead me through them, and bowed, though I could not smile. I saw they looked at me now with a new and wondering curiosity—I saw that I was an object of more personal and eager interest than when they gathered with smiles to

greet their master's bride. Yes! my reputation had come before me—they were prepared to wonder, to comment, to criticize—but I was not wounded at the thought; I only passed by them with a little additional haughtiness, and went to the room which was prepared for me—the same room where I spent that first dreadful night after our coming home.

When I had arranged my dress, I went down stairs to the room which now was the drawing-room, but which had been our dining-parlour in past days. It was a large long room, spacious but not bright, with one great window opening to the lawn, and a smaller one in the corner of the wall. When I entered, he was walking about with an expectant look upon his face—he started and made a step forward as if to advance to me as I came in, but though I saw him perfectly, I did not look at him, and he stopped and returned

again. I went to the window to look out upon the lawn, and the great walnut tree, which I could only be seen imperfectly from this point—then I took I seat in silence. A painful interval followed. I sat quite still, vacantly looking out. He paced about the room with unequal steps —sometimes rapidly and with impatience. We were neither of us doing anything—we were like two enemies watching each other, ready to strike. I do not think that till that moment either of us realized what a frightful thing it was to live together, confined within the same walls, and with this feud between us.

"How are you pleased, Hester, with the new arrangements — the furniture — the house," he said, throwing down a book upon the table, somewhat noisily in his extreme agitation.

"I am quite pleased—everything is very well," I answered. I found it difficult

to command my own voice. I was suddenly seized with a wild wonder, why we were placed here to torture each other. It might preserve appearances—but we surely would have been better with the whole world between us, than together as we were.

"When we were boy and girl we had a conversation here," he went on rapidly, now coming up to me: "do you recollect it, Hester?"

"Yes," I said, "then I believed in you, and pointed out to my father the picture you resembled. My dear father! I thank God he does not see us to-day."

"What picture did I resemble, Hester?" he asked, with a good deal of emotion in his voice. I pointed to it with a quick gesture, but could not trust myself to speak.

"You took my part," he said, "you had compassion for me—you bore me

witness that I was no deceiver; and, Hester, your face, your voice, your generous, brave, girlish frankness, have made my heart warm since that day,"

I held up my hand in entreaty. I could not bear it.

"No, I will not persecute you," he said, "no, do not fear me—we shall gain nothing by discussions of the old question. I bid you welcome home to your own house—that is all I have to say; and now I will relieve you of my presence—you will thank me for that, at least."

But I did not even thank him for that. What had been wretched while he was with me, became intolerable when he was gone. I drew the chairs aside, and walked up and down the long apartment in restless misery. Day after day, year after year, were we to live thus?—together, yet with a world between us—with nothing to say to each other—nothing to do with

each other—a sullen, dreary silence, or half-a-dozen forced words, making all our domestic intercourse. I had anticipated much vague misery, but the actual exceeded the ideal; and yet, though it was miserable to be together, I was impatient and jealous of his absence; and when I threw myself into a chair by the fire, and began to gaze into it, and to brood over our new life, my thoughts settled down upon a nearer object, and only wondered where he had gone to, when he would come back again, and if he came again, what he would say.

It was so strange to raise my head, and look round, and see the familiar faces of those family portraits looking down upon me. Instinctively I turned to that picture which I had said he resembled as a boy. I did not think it was like him now; his face was no longer the face of a student, with those downcast, thoughtful eyelids,

and lines of visionary pensiveness. My husband was no visionary; he was not a man to be consumed of over-much thought; he loved the free, open air—he loved exertion and wholesome labour. With a strange perception, I found out that this was the case. We seemed to have changed characters since the time of our youth. It was I, now, who lived the unwholesome inner life, who shut myself up with my thoughts. I, whose nature was not so—whose spirit was eager, and courageous, and enterprising—who all my life, till now, had loved adventure and freedom. I was paralyzed. I was contented to sit still, brooding and wretched. I cared no longer for the healthful functions of life.

But I was glad when Alice came into the room, and interrupted my thoughts. I had still sufficient discretion to know that, at this moment, at least, it was safer

not to indulge them. I made Alice sit down by me, and talk to me, though she looked wistfully round the room, and into my face, as if to ask where he had gone. Alice had learned caution now, and was silent about him. We began to speak of my father. The harsh tempest of my unhappiness had swallowed the tears, the tenderness, the complaints of grief. I had scarcely mourned at all for my father, as people call mourning. His loss added a perfect desolation to my other misfortunes, but I did not weep for it as for a great calamity—it shut up my heart in a closer seclusion—it did not soften and lay me prostrate. I was under a process of hardening, and not of subduing. Contact with death did not humble me—it only made me withdraw myself the more into my own disturbed and darkened world, my own desolated and solitary heart. But since I had been reconciled to her, I

found a little refuge, a little comfort with Alice. I sat and wept when she spoke of him. I was glad to hear her do it. I felt myself lightened and eased by a conversation such as we were having now.

While we talked thus, my eye happened to fall upon my father's ring. I had to wear it on my forefinger—it was so much larger than the other—and I did not like to have profane hands touch it, or to give it away from me, even for an hour, to have it altered. A misfortune! I had no clue to what my father meant when he called it so.

"Did you ever hear any story of this Alice?" I said, holding it up to her; "he said it was a misfortune. I cannot tell what he meant."

"Yes, Miss Hester! I've heard the story," said Alice; "it belongs to the family, dear. And there's a strange tale

to it, and a prophecy, though whether it's just fancy, or true, or what trust you may put upon it, it's not for the like of me to tell. But I never believe myself, Miss. Hester, that there's power in a bit of gold and a shining stone, even if it's as precious as that."

"I have never heard it. Tell me, Alice," I said.

"It's called the Star of Misfortune, dear," said Alice, lowering her voice with some awe, though she had professed her scepticism, "and I've heard say it was a very grand diamond, and could buy up many a poor man's house; but this I know to be true, Miss Hester, that though it's been sold, and lost, and given away, the house of Cottiswoode never can keep it from them—it always comes back again—and it never can be lost till the time, let them do what they will."

"But I do not understand this. Tell me the story, Alice," said I.

"Well, Miss Hester, it belonged to the second son of Cottiswoode many a long year ago," said Alice; "it was in a time when there was little learning—far different from now—but them that *were* learned, had great arts that are never heard of now-a-days. The story goes that he got it from a spirit—but, you're not to think, dear, that I put faith in that; he had been a strange gentleman, given up to learning and caring for nothing else—though good to the poor and kind-hearted as I have heard. There were but two sons of them, and the eldest, the Squire, was a great gentleman at court and gave Cottiswoode to his brother to live in—and there he used to live all solitary, reading his books and studying everything in the

earth and the skies, and was counted a great scholar in his day. And wherever he went, and wherever he was seen, he wore that ring on his left hand."

Involuntarily without thinking what I did, I removed my ring to my left hand as Alice spoke. In spite of her professions of unbelief, Alice spoke very reverentially, and impressed her hearer with a strong conviction of the truth of what she said.

"Yes, dear, there he is," said Alice, pointing suddenly to one of the portraits, "if you look close, you'll see the ring on his finger; and I dont doubt he was a fine young gentleman, and all the look of a scholar about his brow."

I started with great surprise—the portrait she pointed to was the very same one at which I had been looking

before she came — the one which I thought like Edgar Southcote when he was a boy.

"I have heard of him often," I said— "but I never heard this story—and, Alice, my father never wore this diamond while we were in Cottiswoode."

"It was because of the tale, Miss Hester—hush, dear, and I will tell you," said Alice. "His name was Mr. Edgar, and he was the Squire's only brother, as I said—and for long they were loving friends; the one was great at court and the other a great scholar, and Cottiswoode was a grander estate, and a grander Hall than it is now. But Mr. Edgar chanced to see a young lady nigh and fell in love with her, Miss Hester —and the Squire came down on a visit, and he fell in love with her too—and strife came between the brothers, as it has come between many a generation of

the name since—and the lady chose the Squire and cast off Mr. Edgar, and there was sad work in the house. But the end was that Mr. Edgar left all his books, and went away to foreign parts to the wars—and though his brother and the lady wanted to make friends, he would not, but held up his left hand to them, and said he would leave their children an inheritance. Well, as the story goes, Miss Hester, no one thought more of that, except to be sorry for the poor gentleman, and the Squire and the lady settled down at Cottiswoode, and had two beautiful boys, and were as happy as a summer-day—but when ten years were gone, an old man from over the sea brought a letter to the Squire—and what was this but Mr. Edgar's ring, and a prophecy about the house and the name of Southcote—the ring was always to go to the second son, and it was to

be called Misfortune; and trouble was never to depart from the race till it was lost."

"But you said it could not be lost," I said, eagerly.

"Neither it can, till its time," said Alice with solemnity, "when there is no second son born to the house of Cottiswoode, but only an heir, then the curse was to be over; and when it was worn upon a woman's finger it was to lose its power; if it had not been for that, dear — though I put no trust in such things — I could neither have told you this tale, nor seen that evil thing shining on your innocent finger. Well it came to pass, Miss Hester, that when the poor lady at Cottiswoode read the words Mr. Edgar had written, and saw the diamond, she screamed out it was shining and looking at her like a living eye, and fell down in a fit, and was brought to bed

of a dead baby, and died before the week's end—and the Squire's heart broke, and the two boys grew up with no one minding them. There was strife between them from that very day, the story goes, and when they came to be men — it was the time of the civil wars—one took one side and one the other; and the youngest boy went off from the house by night with that jewel on his finger, and nothing else but his sword; and Cottiswoode was ta'en by the rebels, and blood shed upon the kindly threshhold—brother's blood, Miss Hester—but neither of them were killed; and when that young man died, the ring came back to the Hall by a strange messenger, though it had been sold to buy bread. And so it has been ever since. When there were more than two sons in Cottiswoode, there was less harm—but that has only been twice in all the history of the house. Brother has

warred against brother, Miss Hester, from Edgar the Scholar's time, down to Mr. Brian and your papa; but one way or another, dear, the ring has come back to the house, and never gone to any but the second son of Cottiswoode till now. When your papa was master here, he put it away, and maybe he thought the curse was past; but them that knew the tale, knew well that the curse would not be past till there was a born heir, and only one son in the house. And when the present young squire came, your papa put on the ring again; it goes to my heart to see you wear it, Miss Hester. It never was but a token of evil — I think it put thoughts of strife into the mind of every one that ever wore it; thoughts and examples of ill, darling, and we're all too ready to follow iniquity—God help and preserve us! and that is the story of the ring."

"But, Alice, tell me again—how it is to be lost?" I asked anxiously.

"When there is but one heir, and no second son; and when love and peace is in the house of Cottiswoode, and those that are nearest in blood are dearest in heart; then the ring that never could be lost before, will fall from the hand of a born Southcote, and never be seen again —that is the prophecy, Miss Hester," said Alice, "and if I saw it come to pass, I would give thanks to God!"

I was much excited by this story—it threw a strang weird ghostly romance about us and our race. I fitted the ring closer upon the fore-finger of my left hand, and held it up sparkling, with its living quivering radiance, in the fire-light.

For myself, I felt no desire to lose it — it had gained a superstitious importance in my eyes: I resolved to

keep it sacred, and preserve for ever, as my father had bidden me, this strange inheritance. I was not pleased with my exemption, as a woman, from its magic power—women, as I had cause to know, were quite as accessible to passions of resentment, and even to the desire for revenge, as men were — and I should have been better satisfied had there been some place for me in this grand system of family vengeance. With a different, yet a stronger interest, I looked up at the picture of Edgar the Scholar, with its contemplative student face, and pensive eyes.

How strange that this man should be the origin of such bitter retribution—for it was very bitter, pitiless, almost fiend-like, an inheritance of animosity to be borne by brother against brother. I wondered as I looked up at the regular calm features, the undisturbed refined face

—I could see no cruelty in it, as it looked down upon me thoughtfully from the familiar wall.

"It should be called the star of strife, and not of misfortune, Alice," I said.

"It has been of misfortune, too," she answered; "never one has thriven with that ring upon his finger; there never is strife in a house, dear, but trouble comes. They say the lands are not half so great as when that diamond came to Cottiswoode, and though it's a precious stone itself, Miss Hester, it's never been reckoned in the wealth of this house. There's violent death, there's great grief and sin, there's losses and misfortunes among the Southcotes ever since it came; and the second son of Cottiswoode has never had children to leave it to. I never heard of one that gave it to his own child, but your papa."

Once more we relapsed into silence. I

had a new subject for my thoughts in Alice's tale; and, perhaps, it may be thought strange that I should receive it with such entire faith. But family superstitions have always a great hold upon the imagination. It is hard to disbelieve stories that come to us on the voucher of our own ancestors, and which are part of the family creed, and concern the whole race; even without these claims upon my attention, I think I should have at once believed and received this story. I was quite in the mood for it—and though I did not fear "ghosts," nor show any of the popular signs, I had a natural tinge of superstition in my mind.

But Alice warned me how late it was, and I had to go up stairs with her to dress. I cared nothing about my dress. I suffered her to adorn me as she would. But I would wear no ornaments—not *that* bracelet—nothing but the storied and fatal

ring. Like a real star it glittered on my finger—catching the ruddy gleam of the firelight, and shining in the darkened air of the winter twilight. He could not know this story, and I could not tell him of it—it was very strange to be so near, yet so far apart.

When I went down to dinner, Mr. Savile was there. It was a relief, yet it piqued me that he should ask any one to come on the first day, though how we could have met alone at table in our sullen estrangement I cannot tell. The Rector was in a very precise clerical dress; his manners were a great deal too fine and careful for a man of breeding, and he seemed to be so much alive to his "position," and so careful to keep it up, that I perceived at once that he must have been raised to this, and that he was not a gentleman, either by birth or early training. By some strange logic, I thought of this

as of an additional offence to me. I did not care to enquire what my husband's motives had been in giving the living to this person. I did not take time to think that probably he had been appointed before Edgar Southcote had conceived his plan for my deception. I thought he had meant to insult me by surrounding me thus with his mean relatives, and depriving me even of the comfort of a suitable neighbour; but I resolved to show him that I was above this mortification, and all the more freely, because I said nothing to him, did I converse with the Rector. He told me of the church which wanted repairs —he said restoration, but I was not acquainted with the ecclesiastical science so fashionable at the time—he told me that his sister had begun to embroider a cloth for the altar—that the very vestments, the sacred vessels for the altar—everything was falling to decay—that the last rector "a

worthy man, he believed, but lamentably lax in his church principles," had white-washed the interior of the unfortunate church — had barbarously removed the remnants of an ancient screen of carved stonework—and had taken up a mutilated brass in the chancel, and laid down a plain flag-stone in its stead; which things, Mr. Savile said pathetically, had so much disgusted the people, that there really had arisen a dissenting place of worship in this formerly orthodox village, and his people were led astray from the true path under his very eyes. Had Mr. Savile told me of an epidemic raging in Cottisbourne, of some deadly disease abroad, and no one bold enough to nurse the patients, I should have been more satisfied—but such things would arise no doubt; and, in the mean time, I should have been glad to have worked with my own hands at the restorations, if these were necessary, though

alas, I was disappointed, and could not feel that there was any martyrdom in making an altar-cloth.

All the conversation during dinner was carried on between the Rector and myself. My husband scarcely spoke; he looked at us eagerly, keenly, as if he would have read my thoughts. I could perceive what was passing in his mind; he had given up the Hester of his imagination, as I had given up the Harry of mine; and he was trying to make himself acquainted with what I was now.

When I returned alone to the drawing-room, and once more sat down by the fire, a pang of pain and self-reproach came over me for a moment, as I thought what a great change had indeed passed upon me, and how unlike I was to my former self. But then I asked who caused this, and once more established myself on my old ground. When the gentlemen

joined me again, I resumed my conversation with the Rector—and now at last he propounded something which suited my views.

"There are a number of old people in the village," he said, "some bed-ridden, some palsied, a burden upon their children, and imperfectly attended to in the midst of more clamorous claims. My sister has long had the idea of placing herself at the head of a sort of almshouse, where those poor creatures could be nursed and taken care of. My sister is an energetic person, Mrs. Southcote, and though, of course, like other ladies, accustomed to very different pursuits, has a natural love for work, and great tenderness to her fellow creatures. She thinks with the assistance of a few kind-hearted ladies, hired help might almost be dispensed with — an apostolic work, Mrs. Southcote—washing the feet of the poor."

"Ah, yes! that is what I wanted to hear of," I said, "who is your sister, Mr. Savile—is she here?"

"I am surprised that Mr. Southcote has not informed you, Madam," said the clergyman, with momentary acrimony, "my sister, Miss Savile, resides with me, and as a near neighbour, naturally looked for an introduction to you—a relative too, I may say, by marriage," he concluded, with a ceremonious bow.

I felt my cheeks burn—but I subdued my pride of blood. "I shall call on her to-morrow," I said.

"Nay, permit me," said Mr. Savile, with another bow, "Miss Savile is the oldest resident in the parish—she will have pleasure in calling on you."

Again my natural hauteur almost got the better of me. So! I was to be on ceremonious stately terms with Miss Savile, as though we were potentates of

equal rank and importance—and *relatives*, too!

"She will have the greatest satisfaction in communicating all her plans to you," continued the clergyman, "Mr. Southcote would have had her come to-night; but my sister was too well aware how indecorous such an intrusion on your privacy would be. Ladies understand the regulations of society much better than we do."

In pure mockery, I bowed to Mr. Savile as ceremoniously as he bowed to me; but there was a great deal of bitterness in my satirical courtesy, which he, good man, took in perfect earnest. My husband had been standing by a little table, where was a vase of beautiful hot-house flowers, which it must have been some trouble to get for me—and was pulling the costly blossoms to pieces, as if he did not know what he was about. When he saw the

curl of my lip, as I bowed to his *relation* he came forward hastily and began to converse with him.

How much indebted I was to Mr. Southcote! how much disappointed that Miss Savile had not come!

THE SEVENTH DAY.

We had just set out together to begin our work. It was a raw winter day, damp and foggy, and the heavy haze fell white and stifling over our flat fields, but was not dense enough to hide the dreary line of road, nor the dull depths of distance round us. We were dressed in great cloaks and hoods of dark grey cloth, with small black bonnets under our hoods; and each of us carried a basket —while Miss Savile had a little leathern case, containing medicines, hanging from

the girdle round her waist. She was a tall, stiff woman, with a frosty face, and angular, thin frame. I cannot tell how she looked in summer—very much out of place, I should think—for this dull, foggy, cold day seemed too gentle for her, and you could fancy a keen frosty wind constantly blowing in her face. Her manners were like her brother's, very fine and elaborate at first; but by and bye, she forgot, as he never did, that she was talking to Mrs. Southcote of Cottiswoode, and began to tell me of her plans, as she might have told any ignorant girl, and showed no special respect for me. When she came to her natural tone, I could not help being better pleased with her. She was much more in my way than the Reverend Mr. Savile was. She did not say a word about charity or benevolence; but she told me how she intended to manage the old people, and

how, with one servant, and a lady coming to help her every day, she could keep a home for them all together, and keep them comfortable, if the means were provided for her.

"Extremely disagreeable work, I don't doubt, for you dainty young folks," said Miss Savile, who no longer thought it necessary to pick her language; "but I had my own old father to mind for long enough, and it's nothing to me."

"Disagreeable!" said I, "what does it matter? I wonder what right we have to agreeable things!"

"Well—I am glad you think so!" said Miss Savile, with a grim smile. "You will be the more thankful for what has fallen to your share; for very few people, I can tell you, have to provide disagreeables for themselves, as you have. They are almost all ready-made, and not very well liked when they come."

I had nothing to say to this. Nor could I have expected that she would understand *me*. We were walking quickly —and it required no small exertion to keep up with Miss Savile, who strode along in her thick boots with a manly disregard of every obstacle—along the lane which led to the village. Just before we reached Cottisbourne, we passed the Rectory. Miss Savile looked up at it as she passed, and so did I. I was startled to see a face looking out from the window, which I recognized, or fancied I recognized. It was a weather-beaten face, unshaven and slovenly, and stooped forward with an inquisitive, sidelong glance. I tried to recollect where I had seen it. Could this be Savile—*the* Savile —the man who brought Edgar Southcote to Cottiswoode? I was disposed to think so. My companion gazed at him a moment, and then waved her hand impa-

tiently, as if to bid the man go from the window. Yet I had been now three weeks at Cottiswoode, had frequently seen the clergyman and his sister, but had never heard of another. I wondered why they concealed him—I wondered if it *was* him; but Miss Savile offered no explanation.

We were close upon the village now. The first group in advance—two or three separate houses, stood by themselves upon the brown grass of the meadow-land around. They seemed to have no gardens, no trees, nothing to protect or shelter them; but stood apart among the grass, which pressed round their very walls and doorsteps, as if it grudged the little bit of ground they occupied. There were some plants in the window of almost every house—poor, shabby plants, crushed against the green gauze curtain suspended across the three lower panes, darkening

the light; but doing little else by way of compensation. The want of gardens seemed to disconnect these cottages strangely from the soil on which they stood. There was no beauty or sentiment about them; but only very poor, meagre, hungry poverty. Beyond them, a very small stream, which made no sound in the heavy, deadened atmosphere, wound through a field, with some low willows standing by, like a class of unkempt boys at school. A little further on, withdrawn into a grassy recess, was the village well, with its bucket and windlass; and then came Cottisbourne proper, a cluster of houses oddly placed, with strange little narrow lanes winding among them, as intricate as a child's puzzle: some brown and dingy, with the thatched roof clinging upon them like a growth of nature—some brilliantly white-washed, with great patches of damp, from the rain, upon their walls. One or two

carts tilted up, stood in a corner of the bit of common which belonged to the village. About them, and in them, were a number of children, whose voices scarcely woke the sullen air to cheerfulness. The houses stood about in genuine independence, every one facing as it pleased him, and the wealthy cottager's pig, sniffed the same air as his master, and placidly meditated upon the doings of his master's next neighbour, whose open cottage door was opposite the piggery. There surely was no want of work for any one who cared to take in hand the reformation of the little commonwealth of Cottisbourne.

Miss Savile proceeded to business while I looked on. She went forward to the children in the cart and lugged down the reckless urchins who were clambering into it, just in time to prevent an accident, as the heavy body of the cart, high in the air, where they had been climbing, was sud-

denly thrown off its balance and came down heavily, doing no harm, thanks to her exertions. "You little foolish things!" cried the excited lady, "how often have I told you not to go near these shocking things? you might all have been killed; *I* can't be always looking after you; if Jemmie Mutton had been killed when that cart fell, what do you think you would have done then?"

Not one of the little culprits was able to reply to this solemn question—and she continued, as they gaped at her, clustering together, stealing their hands underneath their pinafores or putting finger in mouth, with awe and astonishment: "Depend upon it, I shall make examples," said Miss Savile, with solemnity, "Christmas is not so far off that I should forget what you are about now, and if I should hear of such a thing again, beware!"

Saying this, in the tone of a Lord

Chief Justice, with an awful vagueness of expression, and penalties inferred which only the threatened offenders knew the weight and import of, Miss Savile turned to enter a cottage. "I am obliged to keep them in awe of me, my dear," she said, turning to me, with complacent satisfaction, "and even to threaten them about their Christmas things. Some of them get quite an outfit of things when they attend school well, and say their cathechisms; but children are a deal of trouble —the little good for nothings! they're at it again!"

I was amused at Miss Savile's contest with the children, yet somewhat disgusted withal. Like other visionaries, I was horrified when I descended to practice, or to see practised, what I had been dreaming. Even sweet beautiful docile children would have been out of my way, and unwelcome substitutes for the harder heroic labours on

which I had set my heart. But stupid children—children who gaped and curtsied —who folded their hands under their pinafores, and played in carts, and were held in terror of losing their annual dole at Christmas! this was quite a different martyrdom from what I had dreamed of; my vocation certainly did not lie here.

However, we had now entered the cottage—it was very poor, and had a sort of sofa or settle near the fire, on which was laid an old paralytic woman, whose shaking head and hand proclaimed, at once, how she was afflicted. A stout tall woman, the mistress of the cottage, went and came about the poor room, preparing the dinner, I suppose; but taking no apparent notice of the invalid, whose feeble half-articulate voice seemed to run on nevertheless in an unfailing stream; and there was an eagerness in her grey bleared eye, which testified that this

old woman, at least, though she had lost everything else, had not lost her interest in the world. She assailed us with a flood of imperfect words, which I could scarcely make out, but which seemed easy to Miss Savile, and showed a craving for news, and restless curiosity which appeared very dreadful to me in this old, old woman. "So she's comed home!" she said, and I knew she referred to me, "does she know her own mind by this time? Ah, ah, ah! it do make poor folks laugh, to see the ways of the quality that never know when they're well."

"Hold your peace, Sally," said Miss Savile, imperatively, "the lady herself has taken the trouble to come from Cottiswoode to see you, you ungrateful old woman—and to see what she can do for you, to make you more comfortable—do you hear? You ought to thank her and

show some feeling—but I am sure you poor folks in Cambridgeshire are the most ungrateful in the world."

"The old folks you mean, Miss," said the younger woman.

"You call her Miss, ye unmannerly wench," said the mother-in-law, chuckling, "Madam Savile, I know you—I know naught of the young one. Make me comfortable! I'm an old poor crittur, past my work, and I've had a stroke; and I want rest to my old bones. But them young uns, that's able to stir about, and help themselves, they think aught's good eno' for me."

She began to whimper as she spoke. Alas—alas! the heroism of my vocation had deserted me. I felt nothing but disgust for the miserable old woman. I could not endure to go near her or touch her—it sickened me to think of the proposed asylum, and of doing menial ser-

vices with my own hands to such a creature as this.

But Miss Saville was unmoved. I suppose she had no elevated ideas of self-martyrdom.

"Well then, Sally, that is just what I came to speak about," she said, "you're in the way in your son's house—and you feel you're in the way."

"Who said it? was't Tilda there?" cried the old woman fiercely. "I'll make him wallop her—that I will, when the lad comes home! Where is an old woman to be welcome but with her children? Oh! you sarpent! it's all along o' you."

"Matilda never said a word about it," said the peremptory Miss Savile, "she has a great deal of patience with you, poor thing; for you're an ill-tempered old woman! Be quiet, Sally, and listen to me. How should you like to be taken

to a new house, and have all your little comforts attended to, and a room to yourself, and ladies to take care of you, eh? I should have charge of you, you understand, and this good young lady from the Hall, and others like her, would come every day to help me. What should you say to that, Sally?"

The younger woman, with unequivocal tokens of interest, had drawn nearer to listen; and was standing, leaning across the table, with her face turned towards us. Sally did not answer at first—and I watched the eager gleam of her old bleared eyes, and the nodding of her palsied head in silence.

"I don't knaew," said the old woman, "*she'd* be glad, I dare say; but am I agwoin to be put out of my way, to please Tilda? she'd a' put me in the House if I'd a' gone. I'll not have no prison as long as my Jim has a roof over his

head. I'm not agwoin to die. I wants to hear the news and the talk, as well as another. I wants none o' your fine rooms to lie all by mysel, and never see nought but ladies—ladies! You're grand, and you think poor folks worship you; but I'd rather see old Betty Higgins to come and tell me the news."

"If that is all you have to say, Sally, we had better leave you," said Miss Savile. "You shocking old woman, do you think you will live for ever? You'll soon get news from a worse place than this world, if you don't mind."

"I'll send for the parson when I've made up my mind to it, that I'm agwoin to die," said Sally; "but here, give it to me, lady! don't give it to Tilda—she'll spend it on her own and never think on the old woman. Well, you've a soft hand: where's your white bonnet and your white veil, and all your grandeur? What's the

good of coming to poor folks all muffled up like Madam there? You're no show, you're not—you should have come like a picture. Here, Tilda, . get me some brandy and a drop o' tea, and tell Betty Higgins to come and sit by me while you're gone."

I retreated with a shudder when she dropped my hand. Her cold touch sickened me, and I could not bear the sharp twinkling of those feelingless eyes, and the palsied motion of her head, as she looked into my face, and spoke to me. I was very glad to escape from the cottage when poor Tilda, a subdued broken-hearted woman, not very tidy, went away to execute her commission. I was very much shocked on the borders of my new enterprise, very much disgusted, and almost staggered in my purpose. Yes! I had thought of nursing the sick and taking care of the aged; but I did not think

of such sordid, selfish, wretched old age as this.

And, yet these were my own people — old retainers and dependants of the house. I had not been without acquaintances among the cottagers, when I was a girl at Cottiswoode—but I recognised few of the blank faces which stared at me now. As we threaded the strange narrow turnings, from cottage to cottage, I had to make no small effort to remind myself that this was clearly my business. Unpleasant! how I scorned the word and myself for thinking of it — what was pleasure to me?

Miss Savile had not been silent all this time, though I paid no great attention to her. She was not disgusted; she had been accustomed to such scenes and took them with perfect coolness—and I was astonished to find that she was not even displeased, nor inclined to shut out

this wretched old Sally from the benefits of her asylum.

"You must not mind what that thankless old creature says," said Miss Savile. "I know how to deal with them; and poor Matilda would be a happy woman if that old tyrant was away. Leave her to me to manage. I promise you, she'll not struggle long with me."

But I only shuddered with disgust. I could not anticipate very heroically my own promised assistance to wait upon this old Sally.

We were now at another cottage, where the door was closed, and we had to knock for admittance. It was opened by an elderly woman, fresh complexioned, yet careworn, with scissors and pincushion hanging by her side, and some work in her hand. The furniture of the little room was very scanty, and not very orderly, but clean enough, and from the

cuttings and thread upon the floor, the litter on the little deal table, and the work in the woman's hand, I saw that she must be the village dress-maker. The lower part of the window, as usual, was screened by a coarse curtain of green auze, and three flower-pots with dingy geraniums, stood on the window-sill, with prayer-book and a work-box, and a range of reels of cotton standing between. Here, as in the previous cottage, an old woman occupied the corner by the fire; but this one was placed in a large wooden elbow chair, gay with a cover of cotton print, which had been a gown before it came to its present preferment—and was tidily dressed, and had some knitting in her hands. A girl of twelve sat by the table helping her mother—a younger one was washing potatoes in a corner, while a little girl of three or four, sitting on the corner of the fender close to the fire, seemed to

be exerting her powers for the general entertainment of the industrious family. When we entered, the mistress of the house, after her first greeting to Miss Savile, stepped aside to let us enter, and looked earnestly at me. The signs of her occupation helped me to a remembrance of her. I looked at her with puzzled curiosity, trying to recall the changed face in its widow's cap.

"Miss Hester!" she cried, "I humbly beg your pardon, ma'am, but I made sure it was you."

She curtsied again and again, and seemed so unaffectedly glad, that my heart warmed in spite of myself. Miss Savile was quite thrown into the shade. The children made their little curtsies, the old woman endeavoured to rise, a chair was carefully wiped by poor Mary's apron, and placed between the window and the fire for me; and Granny made a moaning explanation of

"her rheumatiz, that made her unmannerly." I was restored to satisfaction. I do not think I had been so much pleased since I came to Cottiswoode. Yes! these were my own people.

"We've had a deal of trouble, Miss—ma'am — a deal of trouble," said Mary, putting the corner of her apron to her eyes. "There was first poor Tom fell ill and died, and all the little uns had the fever, and Granny took the rheumatiz so bad, that she never can move out of her chair. It's been hard to get the bit and the sup for them all, lady. But now Alice gets a big wench, and little Jane goes of errands, and Farmer Giles gives 'em a day's work now and again weeding and gathering stones; and I'm a bit, easier in my mind — but, oh! it's been hard days in Cottisbourne since you and the good old Squire went away."

I knew no reason Mary had to call

my father the good old Squire: yet I was pleased with the appellation. "Come to the Hall, Mary, and Alice will see if there is anything for you," I said, "and you must tell me what poor old Granny wants, and what I can do for her. Granny, do you recollect me?"

"I recklect your grandmama, Miss," said the old woman, "better than you—that was the lady! she stood for my Susan, next to Mary, that I buried fifty years come Witsuntide. I kneaw all the family, I do. I recklect the young gentlemen, and Mr. Brian, that never had his rights. This Squire is his son, they tell me. Well, you've com'd and married him, Miss, and I bless the day; everything's agwoin on right now. The Southcote blood's been kind to me and mine, and I wish well of it, wishing ye joy, Miss, and a welcome home."

I bowed my head in silent bitterness. Wishing me joy! what a satire it seemed.

"Are you very busy, Mary?" said Miss Savile. "Now do you think, if Alice had not come to school, and been taught her duty, she would have sat there so quietly, helping her mother? I don't believe anything of the kind."

"Thank you all the same, Ma'am—it done her a deal of good gwoing to school," said Mary, with a submissive, yet resolute courtesy, "but she always was a good child."

"I don't say she's a good child now—she's doing no more than her duty," said Miss Savile, with a peremptory little nod; "there's nothing worse for children than to praise them to their faces. There's that boy of yours—not half an hour ago, if I had not been at hand, he might have broken his neck, clambering into William

Fairfoul's cart, on the edge of the common. I am sure, how these children escape with their lives, with nobody to look after them, is a constant wonder to me."

"Providence is always a minding after them," said Mary, "poor folk's children is not like rich folks; and my boy can take a knock as well as another—I'm not afraid."

"Well, now I have something to tell you of," said Miss Savile. "Since Mrs. Southcote has come home, she wishes to do good to you all like a Christian lady; and I'm going to take a house, or have one built here at Cottisbourne, and live in it myself, and take care of the old people who are helpless and a burden on their families. Mrs. Southcote, and other good ladies will come to help me, and the old folks shall be well taken care of, and have comfortable rooms and beds, and be a burden to nobody. What do

you say to that, Granny? Mary has plenty to do with her own family, and I dare say doesn't always get much time to mind you—and you'd be off her hands, and make her easier in her mind—for I am sure you know very well how much she's got to do."

A shrill hoo-hoo of feeble, yet vehement sobbing interrupted this speech. "I'm a poor old soul," said the hysterical voice of Granny; "but I toiled for her and her children, when I had some strength left, and I do what I can in my old days—God help me! My poor bit o'bread and my tatie—a baby 'ud eat as much as me. Lord help us! you don't go for to say my own child would grudge me that?"

"Folks had best not meddle with other folks' business," said Mary, with an angry glance towards Miss Savile. "You mind your knitting, mother, and don't mind what strangers say. You ladies is hard-

hearted, that's the truth—though you mean kind—begging your pardon, Ma'am," she said, with a curtsey to me; "but I work cheerful for my mother—I knaew I do. I no more grudge her nor I grudge little Polly, by the fire. She's been a good mother to me, and never spared her trouble; and ne'er a one of the childer but would want their supper sooner than miss Granny from the corner. And for all so feeble as she is, there's a deal of life in her," said Mary, once more putting up to her eyes the corner of her apron. "She'll tell the little uns' stories till it's wonderful to hear—and talks out o' the Bible of Sundays, that the parson himsel might be the better—and knits at her stocking all the week through. They knaews little that says my mother's a burden. Alice 'ud break her heart if she hadn't Granny to do for, every day."

"Well! I must say I think it very

ungrateful of you," said Miss Savile, "when I undertake she should be well taken care of, and Mrs. Southcote would come to see her almost every day. You're a thankless set of people in Cottisbourne. You do not know when people try to do you good. There's old Sally—"

"You don't name my mother with old Sally then?" cried Mary, with indignation. "You wouldn't put the likes of her under a good roof! I won't hear you speak, Ma'am—I won't indeed! My mother and old Sally—in one house!"

"I think it possible," said Miss Savile, with a little asperity, "that God might choose to take even old Sally to Heaven. She's a naughty old woman—a cross, miserable old creature—and what she'd do there, if she was as she is, I can't tell. But God has never said, so far as I know, 'Old Sally shan't come to Heaven.'"

This rebuke cast poor Mary into silence. She continued in a tremulous, half-defiant, half-convinced state for a few minutes, and then wiped her eyes again, and answered in a low tone:

"I wouldn't be unneighbourly, nor uncharitable neither—and God knows the heart; but my mother and old Sally wouldn't agree, noways—and I'd work my fingers to the bone sooner than let Granny go."

"You must take your own way, of course," said Miss Savile. "I only wanted to befriend you, my good woman. No—I'm not offended, and I don't suppose Mrs. Southcote is either. What we propose is real kindness both to Granny and you—but, oh no! don't fear—there are plenty who would be glad of it."

Mary turned to me with a troubled glance; she thought that perhaps her balked benefactor was angry with her too.

"Is there anything Granny would like —or you, Mary? Could I help you?" said I. "Is there anything I could do myself for you?"

Mary made a very humble, reverential curtsey

"You're only too good, Ma'am," said Mary. "There's always a many things wanted in a small family. I'd be thankful of work, Miss, if you could trust it to me, and do my best to please—and Alice is very handy, and does plain hemming and sewing beautiful. Show the lady your work, Alice. If there were any plain things, Ma'am, to do—"

"But, Mary, I am sure you have too much to do already. I would rather help you to do what you have, than give you more work," said I.

Mary looked up at me with a startled glance, and then with a smile.

"Bless your kind heart, lady! work's

nat'ral to me—pleasure is for the rich, and labour's for the poor, and I'm content. *I'd* sooner sit working than go pleasuring; but it's another thing with the likes of you."

Miss Savile was already at the door, and somewhat impatient of this delay—so I hurried after her, arranging with Mary that she was to come that afternoon to Alice at Cottiswoode. When we got out of the house, Miss Savile took me to task immediately.

"You don't understand the people, my dear," said Miss Savile. "Mary was very right about the work: it's far better to give employment than to give charity—and that's not to save your purse, but to keep up their honest feelings. They're independent when they're working for themselves, and they're bred up to work all their life; and as for you to speak of going to help them, it would only make

them uneasy, and be unsuitable for you."

"But I wish to *help* them—and giving work to Mary does not stand in the place of working myself," said I, with a little petulance.

"Oh! of course, if you want to do it for pleasure that's quite a different thing —but I really don't understand that," said Miss Savile, abruptly.

"I do not wish it for pleasure," said I, growing almost angry; but I did not choose to explain myself to her, and it was a good thing that she should confess that she did not understand me.

We visited a number of poor houses after this, but I found nothing encouraging in any of them. There were one or two old people found, who were quite willing to be received into Miss Savile's asylum —they were all poor stupid old rustics, helpless with some infirmity, but I did

not find that there was anything heroic now in the prospect of waiting upon and serving them. It was not courage nor daring, nor any high and lofty quality which would be required for such an undertaking, but patience—patience, pity, and indeed a certain degree of insensibility, qualities which I neither had nor coveted —I was much discontented with my day's experience. I was known and recognized latterly wherever we went, and though I had no recollection of the majority of the claimants of my former acquaintance, I was very ready to give them money, and did so to the great annoyance of Miss Savile. As we threaded our way through the muddy turnings, she lectured me on the evils of indiscriminate almsgiving, while I, for my part, painfully pondered what I had to do with these people, or what I could do for them. Though I had read a good deal, and

thought a little, I was still very ignorant. I had a vague idea, even now in my disappointment, when I found I could not do what I wanted, that I ought to do something—that these people belonged to us, and had a right to attention at our hands. But I could not lift the cottages and place them in better order, nor arrange those encumbered and narrow bits of path. Could I do nothing but give them money? I was much discomfited, puzzled and distressed. Miss Savile plodded along methodically in her thick boots, perceiving what her business was, and doing it as everyday work should be done—but there was no room here for martyrdom—and I could not tell what to do.

THE EIGHTH DAY.

VISITORS! I did not know how to receive them; and not only visitors but relatives of my own—of my mother's—her only remaining kindred. I went down with a flutter at my heart to see my unknown kin. He was with them, Alice told me, and I composed myself as well as I could before entering the room; for by this time we had grown to a dull uncommunicating antagonism, and his presence stimulated me to command myself. It was past Christmas now, and we had spent more than two months in this system of mutual torture. We had been once or twice

asked out, and had gone, and behaved ourselves so as not to betray the full extent of the breach between us; but we asked no one to our house—a house in which dwelt such a skeleton;—and nobody can fancy how intolerable this dreary *tête-à-tête*, in which each of us watched the other, and no one spoke save for the few necessary formalities of the table, became every day—yet how every day we began in the same course, never seeking to separate—keeping together as pertinaciously as a couple of lovers, and with the strangest fascination in the silent contest. To look back upon this time, is like a nightmare to me. I feel the heavy stifling shadow, the suppressed feverish excitement, the constant expectation, and strain of self-control, when I think of it. I wonder one of us was not crazed by the prolonged ordeal; I think a few days of it would make me frantic now.

I stood for a moment at the door listening to their voices before I entered—they were

cordial sincere voices, pleasant to hear, and in spite of myself I brightened at the kindly sounds. There were three of them, father, mother and daughter—and when I entered the room, the first thing I saw was a pretty, sweet girlish face, very much like the portrait which Mr. Osborne gave me of my mother, looking up, all smiles and dimples, at my husband. I cannot tell how it happened, but for the moment it struck me what a much more pleasant home this Cottiswoode would have been, had that sunny face presided over it—and what a dull sullen heavy countenance in comparison was the clouded and unhappy face which glanced back at me as I glanced at the mirror. I wondered what *he* thought on the subject, or if it had crossed his fancy —but, I had no time to pursue the question, for suddenly I was overwhelmed in the shawl and the embrace of a large kind smiling woman, the mother of this girl.

She held me by the hands after the first salutation, and looked at my mourning dress and my pale cheeks—and said, "poor dear!" She was herself very gay in an ample matronly finery — with satin skirts, and a great rich shawl, and with a width and a warmth in her embrace, and a soft faint perfume about her which were quite new to me. Her fingers were soft, large, pink and delicate; her touch was a positive pleasure. There are some people who make you conscious of your own appearance by the strange contrast which you feel it bears to theirs. Mrs. Ennerdale was one of these; I felt how cloudy, how dull, how unreal I was, living on imaginary rights and wrongs, and throwing my life away, when I felt myself within the warm pressure of these kindly human arms.

Mr. Ennerdale was a Squire like other Squires, a hearty comfortable country gentle-

man, with nothing much to distinguish him from his class—he shook hands with me very warmly, and looked still more closely in my face, than his wife had done. "You're a *little* like your mother, Mrs. Southcote," he said in a disappointed tone, as he let me go. I might have been when I was happy; but I certainly was not now.

And then Flora came to me, shyly but frankly—holding my hand with a lingering light clasp, as if she expected a warmer salutation from her new found cousin. She was a year younger than I, very pretty, very fresh and sweet like a half-blown rose. She took her place upon a low chair close by me, and kept her sweet blue eyes on my face when I spoke, and looked at me with great interest and respectfulness. Poor young innocent Flora! —*she* did not wonder that I looked ill, or question what was the matter with me. She was not skilled, nor could discriminate between unhappiness and grief.

It was not jealousy that crossed my mind, nor anything approaching to it. I only could not help fancying to myself how different everything would have been had she been mistress of Cottiswoode—how bright the house—how happy the master. It was a pleasure to look at her innocent face. I admired her as only women can admire each other. I was not shy of looking at her as a man might have been. I had a pure pleasure in the sweet bloom of her cheek, the pretty turn and rounding of its outline—for I had a great love of beauty by nature, though I had seen few beautiful people. Many a time the sweet complexion of Alice, and her comely bright face, had charmed me unawares—and I was a great deal more delighted with Flora now.

Mrs. Ennerdale took me aside, after a few minutes, to talk to me after a matronly and confidential fashion—for I was not well, and did not look well; but her kindness and her

sympathy confused me, and I was glad to come back to my old place. Flora followed me with her eyes as I followed her—my sad clouded looks woke Flora's young tender heart to respect and affectionate wistfulness. I don't think she ventured to talk much to me, standing apart as I did, to her young fancy, upon my eminence of grief; but she looked up with such an earnest regard in my face, that I was more soothed than by words. When Mrs. Ennerdale began to settle her plumage, and to express her hope to see us soon, a sudden idea seized upon me. I took no time to think of it, but acted on my impulse in a moment; I suddenly became energetic, and begged that Flora might stay a few days with me. Flora looked up with an eager seconding look, and said "I should be so glad!" in her youthful whispering tone. The papa and mamma took counsel together, and my husband started slightly, and looked with a momentary wonder in my face; but I

suppose he had almost ceased to wonder at anything I could do.

"Well, I am sure you must have need of company, my dear," said the sympathetic Mrs. Ennerdale, "and Flora is a good girl too; but must I send her things, or how shall we do? We thought of asking Mr. Southcote and yourself to come to Ennerdale, but I never dreamt of you keeping Flora. Well dear, well, you shall have her—and I'll see about sending her things. Flora, love, try if you cannot get your poor dear cousin to look cheerful; and recollect exercise—" said the experienced matron, turning aside to whisper to me, "remember dear, it is of the greatest consequence; walk every day—be sure—*every* day."

There was some delay consequent on my request and the new arrangements, but in less than half an hour the elder pair drove off, and left Flora with me. I took her up stairs with a genuine thrill of pleasure—I think the

first I had felt since coming here, to show her her room, and help her to take off her cloak. "But come out first, and have a walk," said Flora, "Mamma says you ought to go out; and it is so pleasant to feel the wind in your face. It nearly blew me away this morning—do come!"

"Are you not tired?" said I.

"Tired!—oh no! I am a country girl," said Flora, with a low sweet laugh, as pretty and youthful as her face, "and when the boys are at home, they never let me rest. I always take a long time to settle down after the holydays. Dear Mrs. Southcote! I hope I will not be too noisy, nor too much of a hoyden for you—for you are not well, I am sure."

"Oh yes! I am well," I said, half displeased at this interpretation of the moody face which looked so black and clouded beside Flora's. "Will you wait for me, Miss Ennerdale, while I get ready."

"Don't call me Miss Ennerdale, please!" entreated the girl, "papa says we are as good as first cousins, for his father was your mamma's uncle, and his mother was her aunt. Do you not know, Mrs. Southcote? your grandpapa and mine were brothers, and they married two sisters—that is how it is—and we are as good as first cousins; and I think, you know, that we ought to call each other—at least, that you ought to call *me*—by my own name."

"Very well, we will make a bargain," said I, "do you know my name, Flora?"

"Oh yes! very well—it is Hester," said Flora, with a blush and a little shyness. "I have no other cousins on papa's side—and I always liked so much to hear of you."

"Why?"

"Because—I can't tell, I am sure!" said Flora, laughing. "I always could see my other cousins, but never you—and so few people knew you; and do you know," she

added quietly, lowering her voice, and drawing near to me, with that innocent pathos and mystery which young girls love. "I think my father, when he was young, was very fond of your mamma."

"Strange! he, too! everybody must have loved her," I said to myself, wonderingly.

"Yes—he says he never saw any one like her," said Flora, with her sweet girlish seriousness, and perfect sincerity.

"Did no one ever say *you* were like her?" I asked.

Her face flushed in a moment with a bright rosy colour.

"Oh, dear Mrs. Southcote! do you think so? I should be so proud!"

"I thought we were to call each other by our christian names?" said I "but you must wait for me till I get my bonnet."

"Let me fetch it—is not that your room?" said Flora, following, "oh! who is that with such a kind face? Is that your maid, Mrs.—cousin?"

"Come and you shall see her, Miss—cousin," said I, unable to resist the happy and playful fascination of this girl; "she is my maid, and my nurse, and my dearest friend, too, Flora—my very dearest friend—Alice, this is Miss Ennerdale, my cousin."

Alice started to her feet very hurriedly, made a confused curtsey, and looked at the young girl. It was too much for the self-control of Alice—I believe she had become nervous and unsettled, like the rest of us—and now she turned suddenly away, her lips quivered, her eyes filled. Flora gazed at her shyly, and kept apart, knowing nothing of the cause of her emotion.

"Is she very like, Alice?" said I, in an under tone.

"Very like, dear! God bless her! it's like herself again. Miss Hester, is her name Helen?" asked Alice with a sob.

"No."

The glance of disappointment on Alice's face was only momentary.

"It ought not to have been, either, I'm glad it is not, dear—ah, Miss Hester! if she had but been your sister!"

"No, Alice, you would have loved her best; and I could not have borne that," said I, still in a whisper; "but she is to stay with me. I will not let her go away again, till she is weary of Cottiswoode."

And Alice—dear, kind, faithful Alice, who had no thought but for me—was grateful to me for seeking my own pleasure thus. I felt as if I had done her a favour, when I heard her, "bless you, my darling!" Ah, this humble love was very consolatory; but I am not sure that it was very good for me.

I was not very strong nor able to walk as I had been used to do. But I felt the sweet exhilaration of the wind upon my face, and looked with pleasure along the level road, to see the thatched houses of Cottisbourne clustering as if for a gossip under the sun-

shine, and the great sky descending in its vast cloudy parallels to the very edge of these boundless featureless fields. The hum in the air, so different from the hum in summer, the sharp, far-away bark of that dog, which always does bark somewhere within your range of hearing in a winter landscape, the shriller harping of the leafless elms, a sound so distinct from the soft rustle of their summer foliage—everything had a clear, ringing, cheering sound; and Flora went on by my side, the embodiment and concentration of all the lesser happinesses, with a gay light tripping pace like a bird's, and all her heart and mind in sweet harmonious motion with her young graceful frame. I had always myself been the youngest in our little household—it was a new pleasure to me, and yet a strange, unusual sensation, to find myself thrown into the elder, graver, superior place, and this young creature with me, whom I could not help but treat like a

child, a younger sister, rich in possession of youth, which I had never known.

At fifteen, I think I must have felt old beside Flora—and now at one and twenty—no great age, heaven knows! I was struck with wonder and admiration at the beautiful youthfulness which appeared in every motion and every word of this simple pretty girl. My marriage, and my unhappiness had increased the natural distance between us. I did not envy Flora; but I had a sort of reflective, half-melancholy delight in looking at her—such as old people may have, I fancy, but which was strange enough at my years.

"Do you not like walking, cousin?" said Flora—"I think the fresh air is so sweet—I do not care whether it is summer or winter—I should like always to be out of doors. I always could dance when I feel the wind on my face like this."

"But I am older than you, Flora," said I.

Flora laughed, her sweet, low, ringing laugh—"I am sure you are not so much older than I, as I am older than Gus," she said, "but mamma says when they are all at home, that I am the wildest boy among them. Do you like riding, cousin?"

"I never ride," said I.

"Never ride?—oh! I am so fond of horses!" cried Flora; "and a gallop along a delightful long road like this—why, it's almost as good as flying. Will you try?—I am quite sure you are not timid, cousin. Oh! do let Mr. Southcote find a horse for you and try to-morrow. But, I forgot!" she said with a sudden blush, which brought a still deeper colour to my cheek, as she glanced at me, "perhaps it would not be right for you."

There was a pause of momentary embarrassment, and Flora was greatly distressed I could perceive, thinking she had annoyed me.

At that moment, some children from the school at Cottisbourne passed us, going home, and made their clumsy bows and curtseys, which I only acknowledged very slightly as we went on. Flora, for her part, cast a wistful glance after the little rustics. "Shall you not speak to them, cousin?" she asked with a little surprise —"have they not been good children?— I should so like you to see our school at Ennerdale. I always go there, every day, and I am very fond of them. They are such tidy pleasant children; and I believe, though it looks so vain to say it," said Flora breaking off with a laugh, "that they all like me."

"I should not fancy that was so very extraordinary either," said I, "other people do that, I suppose, besides the children at Ennerdale."

"Yes, everybody is very good to me," said Flora, with a sweet seriousness, "but, then you know, cousin, I have sometimes to

punish the children as well as to praise them. How do you do here? I am sure you know a great deal better how to manage than I do. Do you forgive them when they seem sorry? or do you keep up looking displeased at them? Mamma says I spoil them because I only look angry for a moment; but, you know I never am really angry, I only pretend, because it's right."

"Indeed, Flora, I do not know. I never visit the school; I have had so little to do with children," I answered hastily.

Once more Flora cast an amazed glance at me. This was more wonderful still than never riding—I began to grow quite a puzzle to Flora.

"Mamma has so many things to do, she seldom gets any time to help me," continued the girl, rallying a little, after a pause. "Do you know, cousin, mamma is a perfect Lady Bountiful; she is always busy about something—and when people tell her of it, she only laughs, and says, it is no credit to her—for she

does it all for pleasure. Don't you think it is very silly for people to praise ladies like mamma, or to find fault with them either? She is only kind to the village people, because she likes to see them pleased and getting on well—and we all like company, cousin Hester, and we know the village people best and longest, and they are our nearest neighbours—and don't you think it is right to be kind to them? but the Miss Oldhams, at Stockport House, say we are undermining their independance, and condescending to the poor."

"I am sure your mamma must be quite right, Flora—but here comes rain—I think we must go home," said I.

Flora held up her fresh pretty face to it, and caught the first drops upon her cheeks.

"It is rather too cold," she said, shaking them off with a pretty graceful motion, and beginning to run like a young fawn. "I like to be caught in a spring shower; but oh, cousin Hester! what shall I do if I get my

dress wet? I havn't another one till they send; and here I am running and forgetting you. Don't run—*I* don't care for being wet, if I may come down stairs in this frock after all. Oh! there is Mr. Southcote with a mantle for you, and an umbrella; and now I'll run all the way home."

She passed him with a laughing exclamation as he came up. *She* could not guess that this brief walk alone would be irksome to the young husband and wife, not four months married. I suffered him to wrap the mantle round me—I wondered almost, to feel with what undiminished care he did it; and then we walked on side by side, in dreary silence, looking at the flying figure before us, with her mantle streaming behind her, and her fair curls escaping from the edge of her bonnet, as she turned round her laughing, glowing pretty face, to call and nod to us, as she ran on. We did not speak to each other; we only looked at her, and plodded on slowly

side by side; and again the thought came upon me—and now, with a gush of pity for both of us, which overpowered me so, that I could have thrown myself down there on the rainy roadside and cried—what a happy man *he* would have been, had he brought Flora Ennerdale, instead of Hester Southcote, to Cottiswoode, as his bride.

I suppose the sight of her, and her innocence and happiness had moved him too—for just when he left me, after our silent walk, he leaned over me for a moment, taking off my mantle, and whispered in a tremulous tone—"Dear Hester! I hope you will have pleasure in this good little girl's society." As he spoke, I caught his eye; there was moisture in it, and a tender anxious look, as if he were very solicitous about me. I had great difficulty at the moment in restraining a great burst of tears—I was shaken almost beyond my own power of control. If I had waited another moment, I think I must have gone to him—

clung to him, forgetting everything but one thing, and wept out all the tears in my heart. I fled to save reply. I am sure he heard me sob as I ran up stairs; but he did not know how I was almost overpowered—how a new love and tenderness, almost too much for me, was swelling like a sea in my heart. I fled to my own room, and shut myself in, and sank down upon the floor and cried. Alice had been speaking to him, I read it in his eye—but I—I could say nothing. I could not go, as his wife should have gone to share with him the delight, and awe, and wonder, of this approaching future. I lay down upon the floor prostrate, with my face buried in my hands. I tried to restrain my sobs, but I could not. Long afterwards, I knew that he was watching, longing, without the door, while I went through this moment of agony within—afraid to enter. If he had entered, perhaps—yet, why should I say perhaps? when I know it is quite as likely that my

perverse heart would have started up in indignant anger at his intrusion, as that my pride and revenge would have given way before my better feelings; it was best as it was. I see all now; and how every event was related to its neighbonr. I see I could not have done without the long probation, and the hard lessons which remained for me still.

When I recovered myself, it is strange how soon I hardened down once more into my former state. I had no longer any fear of meeting him, or of yielding to my own weakness. I rose and bathed my face, though I could not take away the signs of tears entirely from my eyes—and then I remembered how I had neglected Flora, and went to seek her. I found her sitting on a stool before the fire in her own room, spreading out her dress round her to dry, and looking up in the face of Alice who stood beside her. What a pretty picture the two would have made!

Flora's wide dress spread out around her upon the soft warm-coloured hearth rug; her hair hanging half out of curl, and slightly wetted; her pretty hand held up before her to shield her cheek from the fire, so that you could trace every delicate little vein in the pink, half-transparent fingers—and her sweet face turned towards Alice, looking up at her; while Alice, on her part, looked down, with her kind motherly looks and fresh complexion—her snowy cap, kerchief, and apron, basking in the firelight. I was reluctant to break in upon them with my red eyes and heavy face.

"Oh cousin! what must you think of me?" said Flora, starting as I entered. "I ought to have come to see how you were after being so hurried; but Alice began to talk to me, and we forgot. It is so comfortable here—and there is such a delightful easy chair. Dear cousin Hester! sit down and stay with me here a little, till my dress is quite dry.

You were not angry with me for running away?"

She had drawn her delightful easy-chair to the fire, and coaxed me into it before I was aware. Once more I felt an involuntary relaxation and warming of my heart. This feminine and youthful pleasure—this pleasant gossiping over the fire, so natural and pleasant and unconstrained, was almost quite new to me. I did not know, indeed, what female society was—I had lived in ignorance of a hundred innocent and sweet delights which were very health and existence to Flora. My heart melted to my own mother when I looked at my new friend; I began to understand how hard it would be for such a creature to live at all under the shadow of a silent, passionate, uncommunicative man like my father, even if he had not distrusted her.

"I am afraid I was crying," said Flora, wiping something from her cheek, "for Alice

was speaking of your mamma; and, cousin, Alice too, thinks I am like her. I am so very glad to be like her! but papa said you were a little too, cousin Hester."

"No, I do not think it," said I. "I am not like her, I am like the gloomy Southcotes, Flora. I have missed the sweeter blood of your side of the house."

"Dear cousin Hester! I think you are very melancholy," said Flora, looking up at me affectionately. "Pray don't speak of the gloomy Southcotes—you are only sad, you are not gloomy; and I do not wonder—I am sure if it were I"—the tears gathered heavily into her sweet blue eyes. No, Flora, like myself six months ago, knew nothing of the course of time and nature. Flora could understand any degree of mourning for such a grief as mine.

Alice had met my eye with an inquiring and slightly troubled glance, and now she went away—we were left alone, Flora and I

—for some time we sat in silence together, my eyes bent upon the fire, and her's on me. This sweet simple girl seemed to fancy that she had a sort of charge of me—to amuse and cheer me. After a short interval, she spoke again.

"I saw some beautiful flowers downstairs—are they from your green-house, cousin? some one told me there was such a beautiful conservatory at Cottiswoode. Do your plants thrive? do you spend much time there? Are you fond of flowers, cousin Hester?"

"I used to like them very well," I said; "but I do not think I have been in the conservatory here, more than half-a-dozen times. Should you like to go now, Flora?"

"Oh, yes—so much! if it would not tire you," said Flora, starting up; "we have only such a little shabby one at Ennerdale. Mamma used to say the nursery was her conservatory; but I am very fond of flowers.

Oh, what a beautiful place! did you have this when you were at Cottiswoode before? I think I could live here if this were mine!"

Aud she flew about light-hearted and light-footed through the pretty conservatory, which indeed looked a very suitable place for her. As I followed her languidly, Flora found flower after flower which she did not know, and came darting back to me to know the names, reckoning upon my knowledge, as it seemed, with the most perfect confidence. I did not know—I did not know—I had never observed it before. Her young bright face grew blank as she received always the same answer; and by and bye she restrained her natural exuberance, and came and walked beside me soberly, and ceased to assail me with questions. I was not much satisfied with the change, but I caught Flora's grave, anxious, wondering look at me, and knew that this and everything else was

laid to the account of my sorrow, and that the sincerest pity and affectionate anxiety for me had risen in this young girl's simple heart.

She brightened again into great but subdued delight, when I said that some of the flowers she admired most, should be put aside to go to Ennerdale, and when I plucked a few pretty blossoms for her, to put in her hair—they were too good for that, she said, and received them in her hands with a renewal of her first pleasure. Then we went into the drawing-room, and sat down once more, looking at each other. "Do you work much, cousin Hester?" asked Flora, timidly, "for, of course, not thinking that you would wish me to stay, I brought nothing with me to do. Will you let me have something? I am sure you think so much, that you like working; but for me, I am always with mamma, and when we are busy, she says I do get through so much talk.

Let me work, please, cousin Hester—it is so pleasant for two people to work together."

"I have got no work, Flora," said I, faltering a little; it was true enough—yet I had some little bits of embroideries in progress, which I did not like to show to her, or to any one, but only worked at in solitude and retirement, in my own room upstairs.

This time Flora sighed as she looked at me, and then glanced round the room in quest of something else. "Do you play, cousin Hester? are you fond of music? I know great musicians have to practise a great deal," she said, looking at me interrogatively, as if perhaps this might be a sufficient reason for my unaccountable disregard of village schools, and hot-house flowers, and embroidery. For the moment, with her simple eye upon me, I felt almost ashamed for myself.

"No, Flora, I never touch the piano," said I.

Flora rose, and drew softly towards me with humility and boldness. "Dear cousin Hester," said the innocent young girl, kneeling down upon a footstool beside me, and putting her pretty arm round my waist, "you are grieving very much and breaking your heart—oh! I am so very sorry for you! and I am not surprised indeed at all, for it is dreadful to think what such a loss must be—and no mamma to comfort you. But, cousin, dear, won't you try and take comfort? Mamma says it will do you harm to be so very sad—though I know," said Flora, leaning back upon my knee to look up into my face, and blushing all over her own as she spoke, "that something will make you very happy when the summer comes, for Alice told me so."

This simple and unpremeditated appeal overpowered me. I leaned down my cheek upon hers, and put my arms round her, and no longer tried to control myself. She was

alarmed at this outbreak, which was almost as violent as the former one in my own room, and when she had soothed me a little, she ran upstairs and came down breathless with some Eau de Cologne and water in a little china basin, and bathed my forehead with a dainty little handkerchief, and put back my hair and smoothed it as if she had been my nurse, and I a child. Then she wanted me to lie down, and conducted me tenderly upstairs for that purpose—where, however, I only put my dress in order for dinner, and went down again.

My husband encouraged her happy talk while we sat at table, and she told him, "cousin Hester had been a little nervous, and was so very sad; could he tell her what to do, to amuse her cousin?" For my own part, I did not dare to meet his eye. Not only my own agitation, but the natural and happy life interposed between us in the

person of this simple girl, made it a very great struggle for me to maintain my composure and self-control.

When we returned to the drawing-room, Flora drew her footstool to the fireside again, and sat down at my feet and told me of all her pleasant ways and life at home. Then she rose suddenly. "Should you like me to sing, cousin Hester? I cannot sing very well, you know, but only simple songs, and papa likes to hear me, at this time, before the lights come. Shall I sing? would it amuse you, cousin Hester?"

"Yes, Flora," I said; she asked no more, but went away in her simplicity to the piano. Then while the evening darkened, I sat by the fire, which burned red and warm, but sent only a fitful variable glow into the corners of the room, listening to the young voice, as sweet and clear as a bird's, singing song after song for my pleasure. They went to my

heart, these simple words, these simple melodies, the pure affectionate sincerity of the singer, who never once thought of herself. I bowed myself down by the fire and hid my face in my hands, and in perfect silence, and strangely subdued and softened, wept quiet tears out of a full heart. She was still going on, when I became aware in an instant of another step beside me—and some one stooped over me, and kissed the hands which hid my face, and kissed my hair. My heart leaped with a violent start and throb. I looked up and raised myself on my chair. My husband had joined us! Flora perceived him immediately and I had but time to dry my wet eyes, when lights were shining in the cheerful room; and the music, and the charm, and this touch which once more had nearly startled me back into the natural woman, had vanished like the wintry twilight, and I was once more calm, grave, languid, the

resentful, cloudy, reserved Mrs. Southcote, such a one as I had been ever since the first night when we came home to Cottiswoode.

THE NINTH DAY.

It was February, a mild, pensive spring day—for the spring was early that year—and Flora still remained with me. As Flora lived with us day by day, and saw the reserve and restraint between my husband and me, innocent and unsuspicious as her mind was, it was impossible, I think, that she should fail to discover something of how it was with us. But she was wise in her simplicity; she never made the very slightest allusion to anything she had discovered. Sometimes, indeed, when she

thought me occupied, I saw a puzzled, painful shade come upon her sweet young face, as she looked from me to him—from him to me. I could guess that she was very unwilling to blame either of us, yet could not quite keep herself from wondering who was to blame; but the girl had a nice and delicate perception of right and wrong, which prevented her from hinting either suspicion or sympathy to me.

The house was changed while she remained in it. It was not easy to resist the sweet voice singing in those dull rooms, the light step bounding about involuntarily, the unburdened heart smiling out of the fair, affectionate face. I became very fond of my young relative. She stole into my confidence, and sat with me in my room, a more zealous worker at my secret embroideries than even I was. I was constantly sending to Cambridge for things which I thought would please her;

for Flora's sake I began to collect a little aviary; for Flora's sake I sent far and near for rare flowers. If Flora's own good taste had not withheld me, I would have loaded her with the jewels which I never thought of wearing myself. All my happier thoughts became connected with her. She had all the charm of a young favourite sister, combined with the freedom of a chosen friend. We walked together daily, and my health improved, almost in spite of myself—and she drove me about in a little pony-carriage, which had never been used till she came. I think Flora was very happy herself, in spite of her wondering doubt about *our* happiness; and she made a great difference in the atmosphere of Cottiswoode.

While we were pursuing our usual walk to-day, we met Miss Savile. She was going to Cottisbourne, and went on with us, talking of her schemes of "usefulness." I

had given up the visitor's uniform myself after a second trial, and had contented myself with sending money by the hands of Alice to Mary and Granny, and several other pensioners, whom, however, in my languor and listlessness, I never cared to visit. But I was surprised to find how much more easily Flora suited herself to Miss Savile, and even to the Rector, than I could do. She was deep in all their plans and purposes —she was continually asking advice about her own schemes at home from one or other of them. Their peculiarity of manners seemed scarcely at all to strike Flora. She said they were very good people—very active people—she was quite sure they would do a great deal for the village. I assented, because I did not care to oppose her; but I—poor vain fool that I was!—thought their benevolences trifling, and unworthy of me, who could find no excuse here for heroic deeds or martyrdom.

Miss Savile looked strangely annoyed and anxious to-day. I saw her brow contract at every bend of the road, and she cast searching glances about her, as if looking for somebody, and was not, I think, very well pleased to have encountered us. Sometimes she started, turned to look back, and asked, "Did you hear anything?" as though some one was calling her. If Flora had observed her perturbation, I have no doubt we should have left her, for Flora's delicate regard for others never failed, when it was exerted, to influence me; but Flora was not so quick of sight as I was, nor so learned in the signs of discomfort—and my mind was so indolent and languid, that I should have gone on quietly in any circumstances, and would not willingly undertake the exertion of changing my course for any cause. So we continued on our way, and as we proceeded, Miss Savile told me that old Sally had changed her mind, and that she

and a few others were quite ready to become inmates of her asylum now.

"But you—you surely would never condemn yourself to keep house with that miserable old woman!" said I, with a shudder. "You will think I am capricious for changing my mind, but indeed I did not know what a penalty it was. Pray don't think of it, Miss Savile. Let me give her something every week to support her at home."

"You have, indeed, changed your mind," said Miss Savile, with a smile which was rather grim. "But, I don't wonder at it. I never expected anything else, and it was only a fancy with you; you have enough of natural duties at home. But here is how the case stands with me, my dears. The Rector may marry—I trust he will—indeed, I may say that there is great hope of it. I have enough to keep myself, but I have nothing to do. I

should like to be near William—I mean the Rector; but what would become of me if I was idle, do you think? I did once think of gathering a few clever girls about me, and setting up an establishment for church embroidery; but William — the Rector, I mean—very justly says, that I could not afford to give such expensive things away, and to receive payment for them—though only for the materials—would be unbecoming a lady; so I think it was quite a providential suggestion when I thought of taking care of the aged poor at Cottiswoode. Hark! did you hear any one call me, my dear?"

"No, Miss Savile. Are you looking for any one?" said Flora, perceiving our companion's anxiety for the first time.

"No—no!" said Miss Savile, hurriedly, "I cannot say I am. A friend who is visiting us, strayed out by himself—that is all. He does not know the country—I

am afraid he might miss his way"—she continued, in a very quick, conscious, apologetic tone.

And suddenly there came to my recollection the face I had once seen at the Rectory window. Could this man be under *surveillance* by them? Could he be crazy, or in disgrace? Could he have escaped? I became suddenly very curious—almost excited—and looked into the corners of the hedges, henceforward, as carefully as Miss Savile did herself.

And in my exaggerated disinterestedness, and desire for pain rather than pleasure, I was offended with her plain and simple statement of what her design was in setting up this asylum of hers. I said, not without a little sarcasm:

"If it is only for occupation, Miss Savile, I think Sally herself could give you enough to do."

"Who is Sally?" asked Flora, with a wondering glance at me.

"A wretched, ghastly, miserable old woman," said I; "one who would disgust even you, with all your meekness, Flora."

"Mamma says we should never be disgusted with any one," said Flora, in an under-tone—in which, shy as it was, my quick ear could not fail to detect a slight mixture of disapprobation.

"But this is a selfish, discontented, unhappy creature; who looks as if she could curse every one happier than herself," said I.

"You give a hard judgment, Mrs. Southcote," said Miss Savile, roused even to a certain dignity. "Did you ever consider what she has to make her discontented—great age, weakness, disease, and poverty? Do even such as you, with youth, and wealth, and everything that heart can desire, make the best always of the good things God gives them? I am sure you *should* do so, before you give her such names as wretched and selfish. Look what a differ-

ence between old Sally and you—and she's had no education, poor old creature! to teach her to endure her evil things patiently. But I've seen thankless young folks take blessings as if they were curses—I have indeed."

"Oh! here we are, close upon the school," cried Flora, breathlessly, eager to prevent a breach between us. "Are you able to be troubled, cousin Hester? Please do let us go in."

I was not offended. I am not sure that this assault upon me was disagreeable to me, at all. At the moment, it rather increased my respect for Miss Savile, and gave her importance in my eyes; though I confess, when I thought of it after, I did not derive a great deal of satisfaction from comparing myself, my temper, and my hardships, with those of old Sally.

Without any more words, we entered the school—the half of it appropriated to girls

and infants. As the startled children stopped in their classes, or got up from their seats, where they were boring and bungling over their soiled pieces of sewing, to make their clumsy curtseys, I took a seat which Flora brought me, and she began to dance about among them, overlooking their work, and inquiring about their lessons, and waking awkward smiles and giggles among the little rustics, every one of whom hung her head, and turned her crown instead of her face to Flora, as the young lady approached. Dull, listless, separate, I sat and looked on, while Miss Savile talked to the schoolmistress, and singled out some of the elder girls for admonition or encouragement, and while Flora ran about from form to form. Miss Savile represented the constituted authorities. Flora—sweet, pretty Flora!—was only herself, young, happy, affectionate—a spring of delight to everybody. I cannot tell what any one thought of me. After a

little interval, I became conscious of myself, with a dull pain. I never was like Flora; yet I once was Hester Southcote; once I dressed magnificent dolls for Alice's little niece, and enjoyed such innocent occupation, and had, among the very few who knew me, my own share of popularity—but what was I now?

"Cousin Hester!" said Flora coming up to me, and bending down to whisper in my ear. "I should like to give them prizes, and have a little feast here—may I? they are always so happy about it, and such a thing pleases everybody. May I tell Miss Savile and the teacher. Please do say yes—cousin Hester?"

"Surely Flora, if you will like it," said I.

So Flora ran to intimate her purpose—and there was a great flutter and stir, and brightening among the little faces. Then she chose to think, or at least to say, that

I would like to hear them sing—and the children rose with blushing pleasure, and sung a loud shrill hymn at the top of their voices, led by the school-mistress, while Flora shook her head, and smiled, and frowned, and nodded, keeping time, which the singers were nobly indifferent to. *She* did not like it the less, because it was sung badly—she laughed and clapped her hands when a few stray voices fell behind the others and prolonged the strain, to the discomfiture of the vexed school-mistress. If there was not much melody, there was enough fun in the performance, and enough goodwill and satisfaction on the part of the performers, to please Flora—and she concluded by begging a half-holiday for them, after she had first come and asked my permission, like a dutiful girl, as she was. Though Flora was so ready to take care of me, she never forgot that, for the moment, I represented mamma, and was an authority

over her; for to be dutiful and obedient was in the very nature of this sweet simple-hearted girl.

When we left the school, we went with Miss Savile, at her especial desire, to look at two empty cottages, which she thought might be made into a house for her. I stood and listened with no great edification as she explained how doors could be opened in the wall between them, and the homely arrangements of the interior altered to suit her. A bit of waste ground behind, she proposed to enclose for a garden. "The friends of the old people will willingly give me a day's labour now and then, and the gardener at the rectory will see everything kept in order," she said, "here, Mrs. Southcote, I propose building a sitting-room and bed-chamber for myself at my own expense, which will leave abundant accommodation for my patients. May I expect you now and then to see how we are getting on? I don't expect anything more.

No! my dear, I knew you would change your mind—make no apologies,—I felt sure of it all along."

I was not much flattered to know that Miss Savile was quite sure of it all along—but I thought it most prudent to say nothing about it now. Flora was extremely interested in all the arrangements. "I shall come whenever I am at Cottiswoode, Miss Savile," she said eagerly, "for, of course, my cousin is not strong, and it would be quite wrong for her to fatigue herself. I shall like so much to come. May we not go and see old Sally now, cousin Hester! and the other old people? They are such famous story-tellers—I like old people for that; but, oh dear, how selfish I am! you are looking quite pale and tired out. Will you lean upon me, cousin, or may I run and tell them to get out the pony carriage? I am sure you are hardly able to walk home."

But I was able, in spite of Flora's fears. Miss Savile returned with us, looking jealously

about her, and seeming to have a certain terror of encountering her strayed friend. We stopped at the rectory gate to take leave of her, but she did not seem inclined to leave us there. "I am at leisure this morning—I will walk on with you," she said; but I could see very well that it was not any particular degree of leisure, but something much more important which made her accompany us. She grew more and more agitated as we approached Cottiswoode—still no one was in sight—but I thought I had caught a glimpse of the Rector himself, telegraphing at a window as we passed, shaking his head and saying "no," and it was not possible to avoid perceiving Miss Savile's anxiety, and her anxious looks round her. At last, as Flora clambered over a low stone fence in search of a plant, which she thought she recognised among the grass, Miss Savile addressed herself to me.

"I think it best to mention it, Mrs.

Southcote, connected as our families are," she said in an agitated tone, "though being an only child, you can scarcely know what family anxieties are; we have a brother with us—I am sure you have a right to be surprised—but really his state of mind is such that we could not introduce him into society. He has been a gay man in his day—and he has—oh! such a grief, my dear, to William and me! fallen into ways—well, that we can't approve of. He was bred an attorney—a lawyer, and was in very good practice till he fell into misfortune. I am sorry to say poor Richard has not been able to bear misfortune—and he came down here for his health, and we have tried to keep him very quiet, the only thing to do him good—but this morning, you see, he has stolen out, and we can't tell where he has gone. My dear, don't look alarmed—he is not insane. Dear me! how could I imply such a thing! far different from that—he is very clever; but, you know, we don't want

him to trouble Mr. Southcote—or—or any one—and when he takes anything into his head, he is very firm, and will not be persuaded out of it. He has taken a violent fancy since ever he came, of speaking to Mr. Southcote or yourself—and we have done all we could to prevent him—for you know, we don't like to show our family troubles any more than other people, especially as William is a clergyman; but I must tell *you*—hush! here is the young lady coming back—and if you meet my poor brother, Mrs. Southcote, do not be afraid."

Miss Savile ended this very long speech out of breath with hurry and agitation as Flora reappeared. If he was not a madman, why should I be afraid of him? and madman or not what could Savile want with me? On my husband, of course, he had the claim of gratitude, and I could not resist my impulse to mention that.

"I think I saw him once at the Rectory window," I said quietly and in a tone which

must have jarred dreadfully on Miss Savile's excited ears. "Was not he the man who brought Mr. Southcote first to Cottiswoode? I recollect him; I trust my husband has not forgotten the claims his friend has upon him."

I had scarcely spoken the words, when I was bitterly ashamed of them; and I felt my face burn under my companion's eye. She was startled by my tone, and she had evidently forgotten, if, indeed, she ever clearly knew, that my husband's possession of Cottiswoode had been any injury to me, who now shared it with him. When she answered, she spoke in a tone of pique—she perceived a certain disrespect, but she did not see the bitterness in my tone.

"He is not what he once was, Mrs. Southcote," said Miss Savile; "but I think, poor dear Richard does deserve something better than to be spoken of as 'the man.' I am not proud, but I know Edgar Southcote has

reason to reckon a friend in Richard Savile. It was he who brought the poor boy over from Jamaica, when he had not a friend in the world to care for him—and he got him his rights. I am sorry for what has happened to my brother, and grieved for him, and I was foolish to think I might get sympathy from a stranger—but I'm not ashamed of Richard, Mrs. Southcote, and never will be."

"I beg your pardon, Miss Savile," said I—for the moment I felt very much ashamed of myself.

Flora had not succeeded, and was tired with her scramble, and momentarily silenced by the fatigue; while neither Miss Savile nor I had much to say to her, or to each other. We walked on quietly, till we came to the little private gate, which entered directly into the grounds surrounding Cottiswoode; for this favourite lane which led to the village was much nearer to the house itself than to

the great gate at the end of the avenue. When we arrived there, I invited Miss Savile to come in, but she would not; though, as we passed through the garden ourselves, I could see that she still stood by the little wicket watching us anxiously—no doubt, to see if we encountered her brother even here. I was no less on the watch myself, but we saw no one, till we had entered the hall. Flora, as usual, tripped on before me. I followed after slow and languidly; and she was already in the drawing-room, when I had scarcely crossed the threshold, and when the wide hall-door, still held fully open, admitted the entire flood of noon-day light into the hall. At that moment, the library door was opened suddenly, and the very man I had been looking for, stood before me. I could see that he was heated and flushed, as if with some recent argument; and his stealthy side-long cunning look, which I could remember, had given way to an air of coarse dissipation—

that state in which everything is surrendered, and when even appearance and dress and personal neatness are lost in the universal bankruptcy. Behind him, within the library, appeared my husband, pale, haughty, holding the door in his hand, and dismissing his visitor with a formal solemnity, such as I had never seen in him before. When Savile perceived me, he stood still for a moment, and made a swaggering bow, and then, advanced a step as though to address me. I bowed slightly to him, and hastened my steps to get out of his way. "Stay an instant, madam—stay an instant," he said with a little excitement; while my husband still remained behind, looking on. I only hurried in the more quickly. "Very well," he said, with a loud exclamation—"surely, there is no reason, if you will not hear what concerns you, that I should trouble myself about the matter."

I was strangely disturbed when, at last,

I got into the quiet shelter of the drawing-room. I took refuge upon a sofa, and lay down there to recover my breath. The sight of this man, and the sound of his voice, which I almost thought I could remember in the over-excitement of my feelings, overpowered me with recollections. I remembered how we were when he came—how I was disgusted with the familiarity of his first address to me—how my father, for the moment, resisted Edgar Southcote's claims—and how I endeavoured to convince him that they were true. In this room, where we had conversed together—looking at the very portrait to which I had pointed—I scarcely could persuade myself that all was real, and that this was not a dream.

Flora took my bonnet from me, loosed my mantle, and bade me be still and rest. "I am always so thoughtless. I am sure we ought not to have walked so far, cousin Hester," said the penitent Flora. "I will

come down immediately, and read to you—shall I? you ought to have a good rest." But when Flora left me, I rose from the sofa to walk about the room. When I am disturbed in mind I cannot be still, unless, indeed, I am very greatly disturbed, when I can do anything.

I had only been a few moments alone, when my husband came to me. I retired to my usual seat immediately, and he came to my side. He still looked as I had seen him at the door of his library—almost like my father for a time—resolute, pale, stately, a man of invincible determination, on whom words would be wasted, and whose mind no persuasions could change. A little indignation and a little scorn united in his look. I cannot describe how very different from his usual appearance he was to-day.

"I have had a visitor, Hester," he said; "I fancied you recognised him, and I think it right you should know what he had to say. He is—"

"Pray do not tell me," said I hurriedly, "I know who he is—but, indeed, I do not desire to hear his name, nor anything he may have had to say."

"You know who he is—did you know he was *here*, Hester," said my husband looking at me.

"Yes—I saw and recognised him at a window of the rectory some time since," I said, "and Miss Savile has been telling me of him to-day—of course, you did not suppose that I had forgotten his name, or failed to suspect that the rector and his sister were relatives of the man who brought you to Cottiswoode."

"I have very few ways of knowing what you suspect, Hester," he said, with some sadness, "but this you must permit me to tell you without delay; he thinks he has found—"

"Will you do me one kindness?" I asked, "Flora is coming, and I do not wish to hear anything he said. I can have nothing to do

with it one way or another, and it is irksome and painful to me. Indeed, I am tired and not well, and might be excused on that score. Here is my young cousin. I would rather you did not tell me."

He drew back with a slight haughty bow, and retired from me. "As you will!" he said; and when Flora entered, which she did instantly, he left the room without another word.

What a perverse miserable creature I was! though I had refused to hear him when he wished to speak to me, I was wretched when he was gone. When Flora came to me book in hand to read, I permitted her, that I might have a little uninterrupted leisure, and while she, poor girl, laboured for my entertainment, my mind was wondering after my husband and what he would have said. What could it be? whatever it was, he was displeased about it, and in spite of the wide and constant difference between us, I could not

forgive myself for rejecting his confidence—though, indeed, had he returned at that moment, I cannot answer for myself that I would not have done it again.

I could not bring my attention to Flora's book; she appealed to me constantly for admiration and sympathy at her own favourite passages—but the blank look with which I met her appeal, pained, though it did not offend the affectionate girl. She excused *me* to herself as she always did, and quietly put the book away, pretending she saw the gardener going to the conservatory, and wanted to beg a flower from him. Thus I was once more left alone with my unreasonable and vexing thoughts. I might have heard what he had to say, my conscience whispered me—and I recalled the haughty withdrawal from me which marked his displeasure, with a pang which I wondered at. It was all Savile's fault—Savile! this miserable man who brought disgrace and unhappiness home to his brother and sister.

I felt almost a positive hatred in my mind as I recalled him.

Feeling heated with my recent excitement, and very nervous and unhappy, I drew the little hood of my mantle over my head, and went out into the grounds before the house to subdue myself a little. The day was still at its height, sunny and warm, almost like summer, and every twig of all the trees and hedges was bursting with the young life of spring. Rich golden and purple crocuses spotted the dark soil in all the flower borders, and the pale little pensive snowdrop, instead of looking precocious as it usually does, looked late, feeble, and all unlike the sunshine. Waving their numberless boughs far up across the blue depths of the sky, I thought I could see the buds bursting on the elm-trees—and life was rising and swelling in everything like a great tide. I was refreshed by the cool breeze on my brow, and calmed with the sounds and breath of the fresh air out-of-doors. I cannot

tell what induced me to turn my steps to the little wicket-gate, at which this morning we had left Miss Savile, and which opened on the lane leading to the rectory. I went to it, and leaned my arm upon it, looking down the road. I had not been there a minute when I heard a murmur of voices—"Don't Richard, pray don't!—I won't have you frighten the poor child," remonstrated the voice of Miss Savile. "It's for her good," answered another voice—and before I could leave my place, Savile had sprung across the low fence into the lane, and was close beside me.

For the first moment, I did not move, but stood looking full at him with a gaze which subdued the man, though I cannot tell how. "Young lady! let me have half an hour's conversation," he said, in a humble tone. "I know a great deal which you would be very glad to know. Come, don't be proud. I know you're not over pleased to be only Queen Consort—if you'll be ruled by me—"

"I will not be ruled by you—be so good as to leave me," said I, drawing back—"I will hear nothing you have got to say—not a word."

"If you will not hear me, you will repent it," said the man. "I warrant Edgar has not told you a word — no, trust him for that."

At this moment, I do not deny that my curiosity was very greatly roused, but strange emotions were roused with it; I could not bear to hear my husband's name on this fellow's lips.

"If my husband did not tell me, it was because I would not hear him," said I, "and I will not hear you—I do not care what you have got to say. Miss Savile, I hope, will not think I mean any unkindness to her—but I have not a word to say to you."

And I hastened away into the house, up stairs to my own room. How my heart throbbed! how wearied and bewildered, and

sick at heart I felt! What could he mean? What could it be? Out of the temporary quietude I had fallen into, I was raised again into an eager consuming excitement—and for the first time that day, in the pre-occupation and strain of my own mind, I wished Flora Ennerdale at home; for her sweet natural life, so great a contrast to mine at all times, was almost unendurable now.

THE TENTH DAY.

THOSE lingering, uneventful days, though they looked so long and tedious as they passed, how they seemed to have flown when I looked back upon their silent progress! for it was now April; the trees were rich with young spring leaves—the sky and the air were as bright as summer—the flowers were waking everywhere, peeping among the herbage on the road-side, looking out from the tufts of meadow grass, filling the breeze

with a whisper of primroses and violets, and all the nameless favourites of spring. But spring had not come to Cottiswoode—we were as we had been since my first coming here—only that the estrangement between us daily became wider, more sullen and hopeless. We were as little as possible together; yet if his thoughts were as full of me, as mine were of him, it mattered little that we sat in different rooms, and pursued alone our separate occupations. The consuming and silent excitement of this life of ours, when, though I never addressed him voluntarily, I watched for his coming and going, and anxiously expected, and sought a hidden meaning in every word he said—I cannot describe to any one—it was terrible. I could fancy that a demoniac in the old times must have felt something as I did—I was possessed—I had, in reality, no will of my own, but was overborne by a succession of frantic impulses, which must have looked

like a deliberate system, to a looker-on. I can neither understand nor explain the rules of my conduct—or rather, it had no rules. The wild suggestion of the moment, and no better princple, was the rule which guided me.

Flora had just left us after a second visit; she had been one day gone, and I felt her absence greatly. Even Alice did not make up to me now for this younger companion; for Alice was dull, and disturbed, and sad—I felt her every look a reproach to me—and I did not seek her to be with me as I had once done. I lay on my sofa, doing nothing; cogitating vain impressions of injury and wrong; going over imaginary conversations with my husband—turning my face away from the sweet daylight, and all the joyous life out of doors. As I rested thus, I heard my husband's step approaching, and raised myself hurriedly; my heart began to

beat, and the colour came back to my cheek—why was he coming here now?

He came in—he advanced to my side—he stood before me! I turned over a book nervously—glanced once at him—tried to command my voice to speak, but could not. Then he sat down beside me on my sofa. I drew away from him as far as I could, and waited for what he had to say.

"Hester," he said, "this has lasted long enough. If we are to preserve our senses—one of us at least—some period must be put to this torture. Are you satisfied yet with the penance you have exacted? or how much more do you wish me to suffer? for I declare to you, I have almost past the bounds of endurance—you will make me mad!"

"I wish you to suffer nothing," said I. "I will keep my room—I will keep out of your sight, if it makes you mad to see me. I can go away, or else confine myself to my

own apartments; I exact nothing; I only desire you to leave me at peace."

"You will keep out of my sight if I will leave you at peace? that is a sweet compact, is it not?" he said, with vehemence and bitterness, and I could see that at last, his patience had quite given way. "What do you mean, Hester? have you any recollection how it is that we are related to each other—do you know what is the bond between us?"

"Yes! we are in slavery," I said; "we belong to each other—we are united for ever. It is no use deceiving ourselves; we never can be any better—that is all I know."

"And why can we never be any better?" he said, softening and growing gentle in his tone. "Unhappy and disturbed as I am, my fears do not go the length of that. I will not do you the injustice to suppose, that you can keep up this delusion all your life. If you *will* retain it now, I appeal to your better judgment afterwards. But why should you

retain it now? Hester, *you* are no happier for your revenge—I am no better for my punishment. It is now a long time since the offence was committed; look at it again, and see if it is equal to the penalty. Tell me, Hester, what I have done?"

"You have deceived me," I said.

"I told you nothing untrue of myself," he said quickly. "I did not tell you all the truth. See how you have changed me already!—a man cannot be at the bar so long without trying to justify himself. At first I was a penitent offender—but nothing but mercy can make repentance, Hester, and you have shown no mercy to me. What have I done to deserve all that you have inflicted upon me?"

"You have deceived me," I repeated sullenly.

He started up, and made a few rapid strides through the room as if going away—but then he returned again. His temper,

his self-command, his patience, could not bear any more—I saw that I had fairly roused him to strive with me.

"Is this all you have to say, Hester?" he asked almost sternly, "am I to hear this and only this rung in my ears continually—have you nothing but my first offence to urge against me—is this all?"

"Yes," I said, "it is all, and I have nothing more to say."

He could not trust himself to speak, but went away from me again, and rapidly returned once more. "Grant it so!" he said, with a quick and breathless voice, "if I have deceived you, I have been myself deceived—we are on equal terms."

I could not understand what he meant—when it dawned upon me, I rose slowly, and we stood, confronting each other, looking into each other's eyes. "Have I deceived you?" I asked—it cost me an effort to preserve my calmness, but I did it.

"Yes," he said vehemently, "you were a sweet and tender woman when you left your father's house. I thought you one of those whose very presence makes a home—your high spirit, your rapid mind, only gave a nobler charm to your generous loving heart. I thought so, Hester—I delighted in believing it. I thought the key of every joy in this world was given to me, when they put your hand in mine. Look at me now!—I am bankrupt, shipwrecked—from the first hour I brought you home, happiness was ended for me. This house is wretched—the very sunshine and daylight that God has made are no longer blessings to us. My life is a burden. My duties are intolerable. My hopes have departed one by one. I tell you that more bitterly, more grievously than you have been deceived, have you deceived me!"

I was stung and wounded to the heart. A dreadful passion took possession of me. I could have killed myself as I stood, that

he might have seen me do it, and repented when it was too late. Even then, when these bitter words were said, I believe he repented.

"Why did you seek me then?" I cried passionately; "why did you come out of your way to make us both so wretched? I am not a sweet or a tender woman—I never was so—I never pretended to be. Why did you not seek Flora Ennerdale? *she* was fit for you—*she* might have made you happy. Why did you not leave me in my solitude? I never came to seek *you*."

"You insult me," he said, turning away with renewed anger. I think he said something else; I did not hear it. I made no answer—I sat down to wait till he was gone. I cannot even tell how long it was till he went away, but when he did, I rose, and, guiding myself by my hands, went slowly up stairs. I know my step was quite firm, but I held by the banisters and took

pains to guide myself, for there was a darkness over my eyes, and I could not see plainly where I went. It seemed a long time before I could reach my own room, and when I entered it, Alice started and came towards me with an exclamation of fright. This restored me a little to myself. I said I was faint—told her to bring me some wine, and lay down upon the couch till she returned. "Are you ill, my darling?" said Alice, bending over me with a pale face as she gave me the wine. No, no!" I said, "only faint; I must not be ill, for we have a good deal to do. I should like to take a drive—will you order the carriage to be ready in an hour? and then, Alice, come back to me."

I lay quite still, recovering myself till she returned. I felt that to command and compose myself sufficiently to be able for all I wanted to do, required my whole powers. Exerting all the resolution I had, I lay upon the couch refusing to think, resting with a

determined purpose and resolution to rest, such as seemed very strange when I thought of it afterwards—but I had strength to do it then; slowly my eyes cleared, the beating of my heart subsided. I cannot tell what crisis I might have come to, had I given way to the dreadful agitation which had possession of me for a time; but as I lay here, silently looking round upon the familiar room, I felt both mind and body obeying me, and rejoiced to find that I was mistress of myself, as I had not been for many a day.

When Alice returned, I rose—I foresaw Alice's remonstrances, her tears and entreaties, and I had intentionally left very little room for them by ordering the carriage so soon. When she came in, I sat up, refreshed and strong. I could not try to "prepare" her for it; I said abruptly, "Alice, I am going away."

"Where, Miss Hester?" said Alice.

"I cannot tell where," I said, "all that I

know is, that I must go away from Cottiswoode. Alice, come near me—I will not constrain *you*—I will not be offended if you stay; but you must tell me at once what you will do, for I have very little time."

Alice looked with great and pathetic earnestness in my face, but she did not cry, or entreat me against it, as I feared she would do.

"Has it come to this?—are you sure it has come to this?" she asked, anxiously, clasping her hands and gazing at me. "Oh! Miss Hester, consider what it is—consider how you are—and tell me solemnly has it come to this?"

"Yes, Alice," I said, "we cannot remain any longer under the same roof—it would kill us both. He says he is wretched, and that I have deceived him. I did not try to deceive him—I did not wish to make him wretched, Alice!" I cried with a sob which I could not restrain, "but now I must go away."

"Oh! Miss Hester, see him once more first!" pleaded Alice. I suppose she had been struck with sudden hope from my tone.

"No," I said, "it is all over—I am very glad it is all over. Put the things together, Alice—they are all in that drawer; and take what I shall need—nothing more than what I shall need—and what you require yourself, and we will go away together. We have no one now but each other, Alice. You will go with me? You will not desert me? I have not a friend but you."

"God help us! and clear all this trouble away in His own time!" said Alice solemnly, "but it will be a strange day when I desert you, my darling. Brighter times will come for you, dear—happiness will come yet, Miss Hester: but come joy or sorrow, I will never leave you, till God takes me away."

She kissed my cheek silently as I stooped to her—and then she began to her sorrowful packing. I could see the tears dropping on

the things as she put them in; but she did not make a complaint or a remonstrance—she did not even seem startled. I was surprised that she should acquiesce so easily. While I helped her to gather everything together, I said; "Alice, you are not surprised—are you content that this is best?"

"I'm content that nothing can be worse, Miss Hester," she said sorrowfully. "God will show what's for the best in his time; but to aggravate and torment each other as you two are doing, is not to be called good any way; and maybe if you were far off, your hearts would yearn to one another. I'm waiting for the light out of the darkness, though I see none now."

And she went on patiently with her work, in a resigned and melancholy fashion, which subdued me strangely. I had put on my own bonnet and cloak, and sat waiting ready to go away. The house was unusually quiet, yet every far off sound roused me to renewed

excitement. Would he do anything to prevent me going? should we have any further personal encounter? I sat shivering, wrapped in the cloak, which at any other moment would have overpowered me with its great warmth, listening eagerly to hear something. At length, my heart leaped when I caught the roll of the carriage wheels coming to the door. Now everything was ready for our going away. Alice had locked the trunk, which carried all our necessary things, and stood before me, dressed for her journey, waiting my pleasure. Now, for the first time, I began to tremble and give way.

"Will you not write a note, Miss Hester—a few words to tell him you are gone. Do not leave him in such dreadful suspense?" said the melancholy voice of Alice.

"Go down, and see if he is in the library," said I under my breath, and trembling painfully. I did not want to speak to him, but my heart yearned to see him, to look at him

once again. I sat with quivering lips and a colourless face, waiting till she came back again. I could see myself in the mirror; how I trembled, and what a ghastly look I had! I thought she would never come again, as I sat there waiting for her, hearing nothing but my own quick, short breathing, and the rustle of my dress. At last, Alice returned. He was not in the house. The rector had called about a quarter of an hour ago, and Mr. Southcote had gone out with him. "That is very well, Alice—very fortunate," I said, with my blanched dry lips; but it almost was the last stroke—the utmost blow—and I was stunned with the great momentary anguish which it woke in my heart.

Alice drew a table to my side, and put my blotting-book before me. I took the pen in my hand almost unconsciously, and began to write. While I was thus occupied, she had the trunk carried down stairs, thinking I did not perceive her. But even while I

tried to write, my eye mechanically followed her movements. What should I say to him? how I was losing time!

At last I completed the note, and carried it in my hand down stairs. This was what I said:—

"I do not ask you to pardon me for going away, because it is all I can do to relieve you now. If I have deceived you, as you have deceived me, then we are equals, and have nothing to say to each other in reproach or indignation. I am content that it should be so; and as we cannot restore the delusion—you to my eyes, or I to yours—it is best that we should part. I will not continue to make you wretched; and the only one thing which is in my power, to relieve us both, I will do. I cannot tell where I am going—to some quiet place where I may find shelter and rest, till I can die. I wish you only good, and no evil; and

I wish you this blessing first of all—to be relieved of me."

"H. S."

I went down stairs with it softly, with a noiseless step, as if I were a thief, and feared detection; and it was only when I saw Amy and another servant, lingering with scared faces in the hall, as if they suspected something about to happen, that I recovered myself. They went away when they saw me coming down firmly, in my usual dress, and with I suppose, something like my usual looks, and when I saw that they were gone, and that Alice waited for me at the door, I went softly into the library for a moment. He was constantly now in the room where my father had spent so many years—but I did not think of my father, when I stole tremulously into it, and placed myself in his seat, and bowed my head upon the desk at which he had been writing; who was I thinking of? not of the

man who had deceived me, and whom I had deceived. I could not tell—I was conscious of nothing but of the flood of tender affection, of longing, of forlorn and hopeless desolateness, which came over me. I cried under my breath, a name which had not passed my lips for months—the name of my bridegroom—my betrothed—I laid my cheek close down upon his desk; I prayed in my heart, "God bless him!" and then I rose, pallid and exhausted, to leave his house for ever. Yes, there was the bright mocking daylight, the walnut rustling at the great window, the horses pawing impatiently at the door. I left my letter where my cheek had rested a moment since, and went steadily away.

Alice helped me in, and came beside me; once more I saw the face of Amy at the door, and of the house-keeper at the window above, looking out with wonder and dismay; and then we drove through the grand old avenue

of elms, under the tender fresh spring foliage which, for many a year, had brought to these old hoary giants, a renewal of their youth. I never looked back—I threw myself into my corner, and drew my veil over my face—now, at last, I could surely rest. We had only driven about half a mile past the rectory and Cottisbourne, when Alice suddenly touched my hand and pointed out. I raised myself to look; he was standing in the road speaking to a farmer, or rather listening; and I saw his look quicken into sudden wonder and curiosity, when we dashed past. He did not see me, for the windows were closed, and my veil down; but I saw him as I had wished; the excitement of the morning partially remained on his face, but he was listening patiently to what the man had to say to him, and did not neglect anything, as I could, see, because he had been so strongly moved and agitated. It was strange to notice what a difference there

was between him and me. These passionate emotions of mine ruled and swayed me; he —did he feel less acutely than I did? I could not persuade myself so; but, he did his endeavour, at least, to rule and restrain his own heart.

Yes! I should have been strongest at this moment—I never before had taken so decided a step. I had burst the natural bonds asunder. I had rent the veil of domestic privacy, and told all the world of the skeleton in our house—I ought to have been more resolute now, than at any previous time of all my life. But I was not. Instead of reposing on what I was doing, the wildest conflict arose within me. I began to doubt the justice of everything I had ever done. I began to see myself in darker colours than I had ever been represented—a capricious, irritable, revengeful trifler — a fool! — a fool! I stood aside like a terrified child who has set in motion some frightful

machinery. I remembered what Mr. Osborne said—it was easy to make misery—but, who should heal it when it was made? and while I bade Alice tell them to drive faster, my heart sank within me with a desperate hopelessness. I was going away—going away—I should never see him again!

It seemed a very short time to me when we arrived at the railway; as it happened, a train was to start immediately, and within a few minutes more we were rushing along this mighty highway hurrying to the universal centre—going to London. Alice had never travelled in her primitive life. Grieved and full of anxiety as she was for me, Alice was too natural a woman not to show a faint glimmer of expectation when I spoke of London—and while she folded my mantle round me, and wrapped a shawl about my feet, she looked out at the strange roadside stations, and unfamiliar country through which we dashed, with an ecited yet half dizzy curiosity—for Alice was disposed to

think we were rushing upon some catastrophe at this frightful, headlong speed. For me I doubled my veil over my face, and withdrew into the corner, and was thankful for the kindly shade of night, when it fell at last. I could not bear to recall my last journey hither; if I could in reality recall it! —if I could go back and change the past!— but, no—I would not have done that even now.

When we arrived, Alice was helpless— the bustle, the speed, the lights, and noise of the great terminus we had come to, made her sick and giddy. She could only stand helplessly among the crowd, pushed about by the active people round her, looking to me for direction—which, weak and overcome as I was, I had little strength to give; and I was scarcely less a novice than she in the act of taking care of myself; however, we managed to extricate ourselves at last, and drove away, a long fatiguing course, to the hotel where

I had been with my husband immediately after our marriage—I remembered its name. It was scarcely less strange to me than to Alice, to pass through those continuous never-ending streets, sparkling with light and full of noise, and what seemed tumult to us. I grasped her hand instinctively, and she clung to me. We were both helpless women alone in the midst of this busy crowd, no one protecting us,—no one knowing where we went. I began to have a glimpse of what was before me now, as well as of what was behind—and self-protection and self-support do not show in their proper heroic colours, when you have to exercise them first upon a journey, and when your frame is weakened and your mind disturbed. I felt to myself something like a suicide; I had succeeded—I had put a barrier between my former and my future life; I had new habits to learn—new faculties to cultivate—I was no longer to be taken care of—everything was new.

When we arrived and rested, at last, in a comfortable room of the inn, I did not go to rest as Alice bade me; but sat down to write to my agent in Cambridge, who managed the little property which my father had left me. I paused and hesitated a moment, whether I should not also write to Mr. Osborne to explain to him what I had done—but I decided upon leaving that to my husband. My other letter was half written, and I had come to an abrupt pause, remembering that I had fixed upon no place to go to, and could not yet tell the agent where he was to send my remittances, when Alice, who had been standing by the window within the curtains, looking with wonder, admiration and dismay upon the lighted street without, and its many passengers, suddenly turned round to me with the same question.

"Miss Hester, are we to stay here?"

"No, surely not," I said, "but indeed I

do not know where to go;" and I paused to recollect places I had read about, for I had seen nothing out of our own country. I thought of the lakes, and the beautiful North country for a moment; but though I had turned my back upon it for ever, I could not bear the idea of going far away from home. The railway guide, the renowned and mysterious Bradshaw, lay on the table near my hand; I took it up and began to look over it; so vacant and destitute were we of attractions and likings, after we left our own lawful dwelling-place, that the only way of selecting a new home, which occurred to me, was to look over this bald list of names till some one should strike my wandering fancy —it was a dreary method of choice.

I put aside my letter, half written. I roamed over these dull lists; and both of us, solitary women as we were, shrunk at the sound of steps and voices in the great passages without, and drew close to each

other to preserve some resemblance of security and privacy, in this public place where, we almost fancied, we might be exposed to intrusion any moment. At last, I found a name, which caught my eye, in Essex, not very far from London, in consequence not very far from Cambridgeshire. I decided that we should go there to-morrow, and try to find a house; and so, very dreary, very solitary—startled and frightened by the strange sounds in the great strange house—shutting ourselves into our bed-chamber, feeling ourselves so desolate, so unprotected, among strangers—we went to our rest.

END OF VOL. II.

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